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THE DYNAMIC OF RUSSO-ISRAELI RELATIONS IN THE
POST-SOVIET ERA

by

Kelley Grady Dunkelberg

March 1995

Thesis Advisor:

Mikhail Tsyplkin

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Kelley Grady Dunkelberg
Lieutenant, United States Navy
B.A., University of South Carolina, 1987

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March 1995

Author:

Kelley Grady Dunkelberg
Kelley Grady Dunkelberg

Approved by:

Mikhail Tsyplkin
Mikhail Tsyplkin, Thesis Advisor

Dana Eyre
Dana Eyre, Second Reader

Thomas C. Bruneau
Thomas C. Bruneau, Chairman,
Department of National Security Affairs

ABSTRACT

The new state of Russia has been pursuing a rapprochement with the state of Israel since the late 1980's, during the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. These two states have been continuing the expansion of diplomatic and economic relations with one another under Boris Yeltsin. The original impetus for this radical change from the previous position of having no diplomatic relations was the former Soviet Union's re-evaluation of its strategic interests in the Middle East and abroad. Domestic and international pressures to re-establish relations were present in the Soviet era, but ideological and social taboos, as well as entangling diplomatic alliances, prevented this occurrence.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The new state of Russia has been pursuing a rapprochement with the state of Israel since the late 1980's, during the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. These two states have been continuing the expansion of diplomatic and economic relations with one another under Boris Yeltsin. This represents a radical change from past trends in Soviet-Israeli relations, which have wavered from supportive, in the era prior to and just after the establishment of the state of Israel, to cold in the 1950's and early 1960's, to non-existent in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and currently back to warm.

The original impetus for this radical change from the previous position of non-existent diplomatic relations was a result of Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost*, and the former Soviet Union's re-evaluation of its strategic interests in the Middle East and abroad. Domestic and international pressures to re-establish relations with Israel were present in the Soviet era, but ideological and social taboos, as well as entangling diplomatic alliances, prevented this occurrence. A rapprochement with Israel would have run counter to Soviet ideology and would not have been acceptable due to widespread and government-sponsored anti-Semitism.

The climate between Israel and the Soviet Union began to improve, as demonstrated by an easing in political rhetoric. The most significant progress, however, has come after the fall of the USSR. Russia is no longer necessarily constrained by time-honored and sometimes fruitless alliances with certain Arab countries, and the progress towards peace between Israel and the Palestinians has made recognition of Israel easier for Russia to accept and still remain true to their traditional allies.

Russia's new democratic government has also provided the opportunity for new people with new ideas to assume positions of power.

The emerging closer relationship with Israel has the potential to be greatly beneficial to both countries, and, in the opinion of several Russian commentators, makes good sense for several reasons.

First, Russia's economic problems, particularly in the areas of food production and distribution, could be partially alleviated by expanded trade with Israel. Since "capitalism" is no longer a dirty word, Russia's willingness to accept assistance and benefit from Israeli know-how could provide an additional stimulus to an economy in need. Israeli innovations in medicine and technology could also provide the Russian people an improvement in their quality of life.

Secondly, enormous social pressures exist in Russia today with well over a million Jews who remain there, and the population in Israel of Russian Jews which is continuing to climb at a tremendous rate. Positive diplomatic relations between the two countries would facilitate dealing with the issues which will continually arise which will require the cooperation of both countries to resolve. Public opinion in Russia has also been gaining importance and the media has been portraying Israel in a more positive light since the late 1980's.

Thirdly, there are strategic benefits to be reaped from both sides. A friendlier relationship between Russia and Israel has a positive impact on Russia's image in the United States, which in turn bolsters U.S.-Russian relations. And, as an issue of national pride and a way to maintain credibility as a global power (not to mention some vestige of its former superpower status) Russia would also like to be seen as a peacemaker in the world arena, which would require having relations with Israel in addition to its long-standing relations with the Arab countries.

The rapprochement between Russia and Israel has been caused by a combination of domestic and international political developments, and has been facilitated by the change of political leadership in Israel. The ongoing peace process between Israel and the PLO has enabled Moscow to work constructively with both parties while maintaining its integrity by standing by the promises of support made to the Palestinians.

If the Russo-Israeli rapprochement was caused primarily by domestic politics, I assert that we should see a significant change in public opinion, anti-Semitism, and political rhetoric. Public opinion polls from Russia and the CIS show that there is widespread, but not universal, support for closer relations with Israel.

If the rapprochement was primarily caused by the dissolution of the USSR and the systemic change was what allowed the establishment of relations, I assert that we should see a significant change in governmental leadership and a change in ideology. This, in addition to the domestic politics assertion, has also occurred to a certain degree. Neither theory proves true by itself. International politics remains a key part of this change.

The fall of the Soviet Union has left Russia vulnerable in many areas; Boris Yeltsin has had to come up with a viable plan of action to address Russia's many problems. With the end of the Cold War, Russia suddenly had numerous options to pursue. One of these was Yeltsin's decision to continue Gorbachev's plan of a rapprochement with Israel. It has so far proven to be a mutually beneficial venture.

I. INTRODUCTION

April 24, 1994 marked a dramatic turning point in relations between Russia and Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin arrived in Moscow for talks with Russia's Prime Minister, Boris Yeltsin, the first visit ever by an Israeli Prime Minister to Moscow.

A decade ago, relations between the two countries did not exist, a result of the severing of diplomatic relations in the wake of the 1967 Middle East war. Since that time, radical changes have shaken the world political arena, including the fall of the Communism in Europe, the dissolution of the USSR, and a peace accord between the State of Israel and the Palestinian people, represented by Yasir Arafat.

A. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The road ahead is yet unknown; yet the rapprochement in relations between Russia and Israel is certainly significant. Why has this change happened now and of what is it resultant? Was this change caused primarily by Russian domestic politics, or rather by changes in the international system resulting from the disintegration of the USSR? Furthermore, what are the issues behind this rapprochement and what are their implications? It is precisely these questions which I intend to address in this thesis.

First, I shall explore the development of relations between the two countries since the founding of the State of Israel in order to place current events in their proper historical context. Next I will examine the policy changes themselves and what they entail. I will weigh the factors involved in change in Russian and Israeli domestic politics, and the way changes in bureaucratic structure, public opinion, and political rhetoric all have influenced and/or been influenced by events.

My analysis will then proceed to international events, examining how external changes in treaties, alliances, diplomatic visits and trade may have affected or have been the result of the Russo-Israeli policy change. This dynamic concerns relationships including Egypt, Syria, Iran, Iraq and the United States.

Finally, I will attempt to prove that the rapprochement was caused by a combination of both domestic and international factors, plus a bit of fortuitous timing.

The new state of Russia has been pursuing a closer relationship with Israel; Israel is also expanding diplomatic and economic relations with Russia. Domestic and international pressures to do so were present in the Soviet era, but ideological and social taboos, as well as entangling diplomatic alliances prevented the establishment of relations. With old constraints now removed, Russia is free to reevaluate its interests in the Middle East and build a foreign policy more suitable to the present-day situation.

In the Soviet period, the USSR's relationship with Israel ranged from barely normal to the recent rapprochement. Under Soviet leadership, some of the elites were probably aware that positive relations with Israel could have been beneficial for their country, but such a move ran counter to Soviet ideology and would not have been acceptable due to widespread and government-sponsored anti-Semitism.

It was not until Mikhail Gorbachev and the effects of *glasnost* that things began to change. The climate between Israel and the Soviet Union began to improve, as demonstrated by an easing in political rhetoric. The most significant progress, however, has come after the fall of the USSR. Russia is no longer necessarily constrained by time-honored and fruitless alliances with certain Arab countries, and the progress towards peace between Israel and the Palestinians has made recognition of Israel easier to accept and still remain true to their traditional allies.

Russia's new democratic government has also provided the opportunity for new people with new ideas to assume positions of power. The emerging closer relationship with Israel has the potential to be greatly beneficial to both countries, and, in the opinion of Russian commentators, makes good sense for several reasons.

First, Russia's economic problems, particularly in the areas of food production and distribution, could be partially alleviated by expanded trade with Israel. Since "capitalism" is no longer a dirty word, Russia's willingness to accept assistance and benefit from Israeli know-how could provide an additional stimulus to an economy in need. Israeli innovations

in medicine and technology could also provide the Russian people an improvement in their quality of life.

Secondly, there exists enormous social pressures in Russia today with well over a million Jews who remain there, and the population in Israel of Russian Jews which is continuing to climb at a tremendous rate. Positive diplomatic relations between the two countries would facilitate dealing with the issues which will continually arise which require the cooperation of both countries to resolve. Public opinion in Russia has also been gaining importance and the media has been portraying Israel in a more positive light since the late 1980's.

Thirdly, there are strategic benefits to be reaped from both sides. A friendlier relationship between Russia and Israel has a positive impact on Russia's image in the United States, which in turn bolsters U.S.-Russian relations. And, as an issue of national pride and a way to maintain credibility as a global power (not to mention some vestige of its former superpower status) Russia would also like to be seen as peacemaker in the world arena, which would require having relations with Israel in addition to its long-standing relations with the Arab countries.

B. METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

The methodology to be utilized to answer these questions consists of answering the following research questions: first, to analyze whether the change was caused primarily by domestic politics, I assert that if the rapprochement was caused strictly through changes in domestic politics, we should see a significant change in public opinion, anti-Semitism, and political rhetoric. This will be the dependent variable.

I will review available public opinion polls from Russia, examining the change in political and anti-Semitic attitudes; I will survey the change in political rhetoric about one another both in Russia and in Israel, and review the status of Russia's alliances in the Middle East and their implications.

Secondly, why did the rapprochement not happen before? This ties us into the second question: if the rapprochement was primarily caused by the dissolution of the USSR, and the systemic change was what allowed the establishment of relations, we should see a significant change in the

governmental leadership and a change in ideology as well. New faces should appear in the policy-making positions and possibly a new constitution, etc. I will research how many new people occupy the influential positions in the government, and what their political affiliation is and was.

Could it have occurred without the fall of the Soviet Union? Perhaps this question ties into the issue of timing. Russia was going through its own internal changes even before the fall of the Soviet Union, and whereas some of these pressures may well have brought about the demise of the Soviet Union, it is impossible to speculate on what would have happened if the Union had remained intact. A number of factors going on simultaneously in other parts of the world may have had their own impact on the change in relations. It is my intent to explore all these avenues and determine the factor or combination of factors which are responsible for this change.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter will outline the historical background of relations between Russia and Israel, in order to give the reader a better understanding of recent events from their historical context.

Relations between the former Soviet Union and the State of Israel have wavered between both ends of the spectrum over the course of the twentieth century. Understanding the significance of the most recent changes in Russo- Israeli relations requires the review of these events in light of their historical context.

A. PRE-STATEHOOD OF ISRAEL

Russia had, since prior to the turn of the century, a notoriously poor record regarding the treatment of its own Jewish citizens, and this anti-Jewish attitude, which carried through the Russian Revolution and into the Soviet period, was reflected in the initial reactions to the establishment of a Zionist organization and their objective: the establishment of a national homeland for all the Jews of the world. Zionism was, according to the Soviets, a nationalist-bourgeois movement and an instrument of British imperial policy. In the years prior to the establishment of the Jewish state, Russia still bore the scars of the early pogroms, and the two world wars in which so many of her people were lost. However, anti-Zionist sentiment was consistently and repeatedly articulated over several decades prior to 1947 by Communist ideologists and practical politicians alike, and reflected in Soviet domestic policy towards Jews.¹

May 14, 1947 marked the first and shocking turning point in Soviet policy toward the Zionist movement. In a speech at the United Nations General Assembly, Soviet Representative Andrei Gromyko presented a famous speech, in which he declared the Soviet Union's willingness to support the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Speculations regarding the reasoning behind this startling declaration include Moscow's disappointment with the Arab nationalist movement, which

¹Dagan, Avigdor. Moscow and Jerusalem. London: Abelard-Schuman, 1970.

was pro-German during the war; feelings of anti-Western camaraderie and potential alliance with the Jews of Palestine, who were engaged in a bitter struggle with the British Mandatory Power², and the Soviet Union's belief that their own strategic interests would be better served supporting a Jewish state in the Middle East rather than being at odds with one. There was never any serious speculation, however, that Moscow was expressing any newly-found pro-Jewish sentiment. "One should never forget, however, that basically Soviet policy was dedicated to the social and political revolution in the Middle East, and that all Soviet moves, either pro-Arab or pro-Jewish, had to be treated as tactics subordinated to this major objective."³

In his book outlining the changing relationship between the two countries, Moscow and Jerusalem, Avigdor Dagan explains the concerns of the Soviet government at that time; Soviet leadership was trying to determine the most beneficial strategic position in the Middle East while many factors were changing around them. There was great debate over who would emerge with the upper hand in settling the post-World War II Middle East situation- the countries of the Arab League or the Jews of Palestine, struggling for their autonomy. He believes the decisive factors which form the basis of the shift in the traditional Soviet position to be the Soviets' desire to eliminate Great Britain, the most influential power at that time, from the region; the Soviets' pressure towards the West and hopes to gain influence in the Mediterranean area; the Soviets' lack of confidence in the efficacy and usefulness of the Arab countries in support of their goals; and the overestimation of the Jews' readiness to fight, after the establishment of the State of Israel, to protect the interests of their new state.

The decision was, therefore, based on a cool calculation of the factors that Moscow at that time believed would best further its power interests in the region, not on any feelings of sympathy or kinship. Their desire to achieve this was so strong that they were able to put aside their traditional sentiments to take this step, unprecedented for them. Gromyko qualified

²Ibid., p. 20-21.

³Lenczowski, George. The Middle East in World Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980. p. 417.

this statement by explaining that Soviet support of a Jewish state would be forthcoming "only if relations between the Jewish and the Arab populations of Palestine indeed proved to be so bad that it would be impossible to reconcile them and to ensure the peaceful coexistence of the Arabs and Jews." This clearly acknowledges the lack of any kind of patriotic motivation or loyalty to the Jews behind the Soviets' support of Israel.

B. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ISRAEL

In a later speech in November, 1947, Gromyko voiced the Soviet Union's support of the United Nations' partition plan for Palestine, alienating many Arab leaders. From November and into the following year, the Soviets consistently defended the rights of the "Arab and Jewish people of Palestine," claiming that the situation was being manipulated by the West, notably Great Britain and the United States, to further their own territorial and political influence in the region on behalf of their oil interests.

Soviet political rhetoric of that time indicates that the Soviet Union was engaged in precisely the same endeavor. Their steadfast support of Israel continued through Israel's declaration of statehood in May, 1948, and the subsequent attack on Israel by the Arab states who refused to recognize Israel's legitimacy. The Soviet Union blamed not only the Arab states involved in the fighting, but also Great Britain and her allies, as expressed by Vasili Tarassenko, Ukrainian representative to the First Committee on May 28, 1948,

It is no exaggeration to say that the United Kingdom resolution is designed to stifle the State of Israel and the Jewish people in Palestine. The United Kingdom resolution would induce the Security Council to adopt a form of nonintervention while we have recently heard one of the parties state repeatedly that it considers it has an imprescriptible right to carry out armed intervention in the internal affairs of Palestine, to destroy the state of Israel by force of arms and to bombard the peaceful cities of Israel under the pretext of restoring order.⁴

⁴Dagan, Avigdor. p. 31.

The Soviets also opposed the limits on Jewish immigration to Palestine, claiming that it did not constitute a threat to the security of the Arab states, infringed upon the rights of the Jewish people, and encroached upon the sovereign rights of a state, contrary to the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.⁵

It seems that in 1948 Israel could not have had a better friend than the Soviet Union, who defended the interests of the new Jewish state at every turn, even to the dismay of certain Arab states with whom the Soviet Union was also seeking to improve relations, such as Egypt and Syria. Diplomatic missions were established; the Soviets opened theirs in Tel Aviv in August, and the Israelis arrived in Moscow to open their mission in September, headed by Ms. Golda Myerson, later to be known as Golda Meir. Preliminary diplomatic and commercial working sessions were successful and promising. There was great excitement in the air among Moscow's Jewish community, as Ms. Meir brought up the question of *aliya* of the Soviet Union's Jews at her first meeting with the head of the Foreign Ministry's Middle Eastern Department- on September 16, the very same day that the first applications for emigration to Israel were received at the Legation in Moscow.

C. RELATIONS BEGIN TO SOUR

Everything seemed to be going well on the official level until the publication of a controversial article in *Pravda* on September 21, 1948. This notorious article appeared in the immediate wake of the first visit of the Israelis to the Moscow synagogue and to the Jewish Theater. This essay, to become known as the "Ehrenburg Article," was written by Ilya Ehrenburg, a seasoned author of Jewish origin and willing weathervane of the regime's changing attitudes. The article condemned Zionists as "mystics," and denied that there was any affinity between Jews in various

⁵Ibid., p. 31-32.

countries; it condemned Israel's government as "bourgeois," and encouraged Israeli workers to fight against it.⁶

This event signified an unofficial change in sentiment toward the wholeheartedly enthusiastic support for the state of Israel, notifying Soviet Jews that support for Israel did not mean that they would be permitted to emigrate; the Soviet Jewish question would remain a domestic concern, and support for Israel did emphatically not mean support for Zionism. Soviet Jews were not to have any contact with Jews outside the Soviet Union. Immigration to Israel from any of the Communist countries would not be permitted.⁷

Although formal relations were not affected and remained positive, an ill wind borne of a possible misunderstanding began to blow between the two countries. This was unanticipated and embarrassing for the Soviets, who hoped the Israelis would downplay the kinship between Russia's Jews and the Israelis. But the Israelis were not willing to give up so easily.

Nineteen forty-nine was an eventful year in the establishment of the new post-war order. The Marshall Plan was in full swing; NATO was being established, as well as the Warsaw Pact. It was at this time that Moscow began to have doubts about Israel's political loyalty, for as the Soviet Union's relationship with the countries of the West became increasingly polarized, it also became clear to Moscow that Israel was interested in maintaining a close relationship with the United States. The Soviets started to become uneasy at the substantial loans Israel was receiving from the United States and the friendly relations which that entailed. Israel's solution was to reassure Moscow of their loyalty and to expand their economic relations with one another.

On May 5, 1949 Israeli Charge d'Affaires Namir met with Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Zorin. Mr. Zorin went out of his way to sound friendly, and assuring Israel of the Soviets' admiration. The Soviet Union could be counted on by Israel for whatever assistance and support necessary, he explained, provided Israel would continue "on the right political line." He did not expound about the exact meaning of this, but

⁶Rubin, Ronald. The Unredeemed: Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968. p. 152.

⁷Dagan, Avigdor. p. 36-37.

statements both official and unofficial throughout 1949 reflect Moscow's expectation that Israel would not begin working on behalf of British or American interests, and that the Soviet Union's support depended on precisely that.

The year's high point in Russo-Israeli relations was the conclusion of an agreement in August, whereby all former Russian Orthodox properties, including churches, convents, and hospices, both in Jerusalem and throughout Israel, were taken over by the Soviet government and the Soviet-controlled Orthodox Church.

This arrangement placed Soviet representatives in a strategic position in the heart of Jerusalem and delivered into their hands the hitherto anti-Communist Orthodox organization in Palestine. Russia promptly appointed a member of the Soviet Orthodox hierarchy Archbishop of Jerusalem. Israel also concluded a number of trade treaties with the Soviet European satellites, thus linking to some extent her economy to that of the postwar Soviet empire.⁸

It can be said that the Soviet Union was undergoing a change of line from full support to passive neutrality. This can be seen as part of the general anti-"cosmopolitan" line, a campaign within the Soviet Union which reached its height in the first half of 1949, condemning authors, artists and others who "failed to reorient themselves" toward the proper Soviet line, a charge which could be interpreted, according to Soviet law, as a premeditated crime.⁹ In fact, the 1950's were characterized by a reorientation of Soviet policy toward closer relations with the Arab world. The causes of this change were the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 and the growing conviction that Israel was little more than a satellite of the United States.¹⁰ The Soviet press echoed this suspicion. Also, the significance of the outbreak of war in Korea should not be underestimated, with Israel facing off against many Arab countries during United Nations proceedings, who condemned North Korea's invasion of the South but

⁸Lenczowski, George. p. 418.

⁹Heller, Mikhail and Aleksandr Nekrich. Utopia in Power: The History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present. New York: Summit Books, 1986. p. 564.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 564.

insisted that a parallel be drawn between that situation and Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. The primary issue of contention between Israel and the USSR was that the Soviets backed the North Koreans and that Israel insisted on backing the United Nations' plan to intervene for the restoration of international security and peace, and refused to condone Moscow's withdrawal from the council's vote because of its own grievances. Despite later words from Israel which attempted to soften her stance, Moscow felt betrayed.

"Israel's stand on Korea transformed the doubts already existing in the minds of the Russians into a certainty that not only could Israel be discounted as a potential ally, but that it could not even be relied upon to remain neutral in a crisis of vital importance to the Soviet Union."¹¹ This explains the cooling of relations between the two countries in 1951, a year filled with diplomatic snubs, lack of response to governmental requests, and a lack of Soviet support of Israel during United Nations proceedings. Israel found itself with increasing frequency on the opposite side of the fence from the Soviets on a variety of issues, while the Soviets for the most part abstained from voting on any issue which directly concerned Israel.

Nineteen fifty-three marked a year of political change in Israel, with the retirement of David Ben Gurion from active political life. A dedicated leader, he emerged "not only as the practically undisputed leader of Israel but also as the living symbol of those dynamic values and the assertive spirit that characterized modern political Zionism."¹² He would return to political life two years later, to deal with the enormous growing internal challenges within Israeli society, with an increasing influence of the Eastern Sephardim over the Western Ashkenazim, plus the clash between ultra-orthodox versus the reform, secular and socialist elements, and the nationalistic expansionist-minded Herut, versus the more pacifistic and moderate social elements.

Communism could not be disregarded as a problem either. The knowledge now available on Communist tactics indicates that the party seldom relies on overt activities only and that it tends to employ, with increasing success, the method of

¹¹Dagan, Avigdor. p. 53.

¹²Lenczowski, George. p. 419.

infiltration into other organizations. In the Middle East in general, the line drawn between the Communists and the Socialists has never been as clear as in some of the more advanced countries in the West. In Israel this phenomenon found its reflection in the existence of the left-wing socialist party, the *Mapam*, which rather consistently showed pro-Soviet leanings. Its pronounced leftist tendency in conjunction with a pro-Soviet orientation left it open to accusations of dangerous closeness to communism.¹³

D. RUSSO-ISRAELI RELATIONS ARE SEVERED

Relations between the two countries were severed in 1953 following the explosion of a bomb in the Soviet Legation in Tel Aviv. The break occurred in conjunction with the anti-Semitic campaign prompted by the spurious "Jewish Doctors' Plot", in which several prominent physicians in Russia, including Stalin's own personal physician, were arrested on trumped-up charges and, after "confessing" their guilt (extracted by means of torture) of plotting to murder members of the Party elite by giving improper medical treatment, were sentenced to death. The event raised the awareness and indignation of much of the free world. After Stalin's death and the exposure of the bogus conspiracy, relations between the USSR and Israel were [quickly] restored.¹⁴

Meanwhile, the Soviets were cultivating their Arab alliances. In 1953 the Soviets began pursuing a closer relationship with Syria and Egypt, which was proven during the Suez Canal conflict, in which Great Britain, France, and Israel attacked Egypt in response to the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Due to the intervention of the United States and the United Nations in the settlement after this war, Israel and Egypt never got a chance to come to a peace agreement with one another. The Soviet-Egyptian friendship would last through the sixties under the leadership of Gamal Abd-el Nasser, and into the seventies, abruptly terminated by Anwar Sadat in 1972 by the expulsion of the entire Soviet military mission; the Syrian alliance, however, would last much longer.

¹³Ibid. p.420.

¹⁴Nogee, Joseph and Robert Donaldson. Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War II. New York: Pergamon Press, 1984. p. 103-104.

If one were to follow the Arab proverb that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," then the Israelis could certainly have interpreted the Soviets' blossoming friendship with Egypt as a menace to its own relationship with the Soviet Union (despite the propaganda to the contrary) not to mention to Israel's national security, with such a superpower now backing one's avowed enemy.

In July 1955 Shepilov, editor-in-Chief of *Pravda* and a future secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, was sent to Egypt. From that moment, Soviet expansion in the Middle East increased. Egyptian President Nasser needed arms, which he soon began to receive from a Soviet satellite- Czechoslovakia. Later, the Soviet Union began supplying Egypt directly with tanks and aircraft, MIG fighters, for example, as well as artillery systems.¹⁵

This closeness between Soviet-Egyptian relations was coupled with an identifiable coldness between Israel and the Soviet Union. This new Soviet attitude found full expression in a speech delivered by Communist Party Secretary Nikita Khrushchev on December 29, 1955, stating "that from the first day of its existence, the State of Israel has been taking a hostile, threatening position toward its neighbors. Imperialists are behind Israel, trying to exploit it against the Arabs for their own benefit."¹⁶

1. The Suez War of 1956

Nineteen fifty-six, however, was a year that put everyone's loyalties to the test. The events surrounding the outbreak of the Suez War involved not only Egypt and Israel, but the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and France. On July 19, 1956 the U.S. Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, declared that the Egyptian economy was bankrupt and that the United States, Great Britain and the International Bank were therefore withdrawing their offer to finance the construction of the Aswan High Dam. The new Soviet Foreign Minister Dimitri Shepilov, having recently replaced Molotov, traveled to Egypt to participate in the 26th of July

¹⁵Heller & Nekrich, p. 564.

¹⁶Lenczowski, George. 427.

Revolution celebrations. In a meeting with Gamal Abd-el Nasser, he declared that the Soviet Union would be willing to carry out the Aswan High Dam project. Feeling empowered by the good news, Nasser made a bold move in retaliation for the withdrawal of support from the U.S. and Great Britain- he declared the Suez Canal nationalized.¹⁷

This proclamation precipitated a flurry of events. The British and the French, each owners of 50% of the Suez Canal Company, called several secret meetings which included Israel. While these three countries invited Egypt to come and attend an international conference on the issue in London, they were simultaneously gearing up for an attack on Egypt, which was launched in the Sinai on October 29, 1956. Nasser, having rejected the British/French ultimatum to rescind their action, fought on and suffered heavy losses. Nasser asked President Eisenhower via the U.S. ambassador to "deal with" its allies, while Egypt would take care of Israel.

When the Soviet Union learned that Britain and France had responded to the U.S. President's request, it addressed a warning- known as the Khrushchev-Bulganin Ultimatum-to both countries. It was nothing in effect but an exercise in muscle-flexing and an attempt to appear as though the Soviet Union had saved the situation. This was not, of course, the case. It was Eisenhower who did so. Both Britain and France obeyed his orders and withdrew their forces by December 23. Israel followed suit.¹⁸

President Nasser missed a golden opportunity in the wake of the 1956 tripartite aggression, however; instead of recognizing Egypt's victory as a result of Eisenhower's intervention, he attributed the victory to the Soviet warning, praising their efforts to the disregard of Eisenhower's role. "Nasser should have seized the chance to consolidate U.S.-Egyptian relations, if only to frustrate the Israeli strategy which sought the reverse."¹⁹

The Suez conflict of 1956 provided a massive distraction from Soviet activities on another front, the Soviet invasion into Hungary. While

¹⁷Sadat, Anwar. In Search of Identity. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. p. 142.

¹⁸Ibid. p. 146.

¹⁹Ibid. p. 147.

popular support in Moscow was very vocal on behalf of Egypt, there was no such demonstration on Hungary's behalf.

The years after Stalin's death and into the 1960's were years of normal relations between the Soviet Union and Israel, but they can hardly be described as friendly. Characterized by a growing closeness with the Arab states, the Soviets exhibited a growing antagonism with those states considered to be overly supportive of the West, including Turkey. Israel was not often mentioned by name, but the implications were perfectly clear. The relationship had deteriorated due to the Soviet Union's reprioritization of strategic interests in the Middle East.

At the same time that these "normal" relations were in place, Israel was constantly at odds with its Arab neighbors. Incidents of "infiltration" into Israeli territory by neighboring Arabs were responded to with harsh government-sponsored retaliation, which fueled further conflict. This involved reprisals not only against the Palestinians who resided along the border in the refugee camps and sought passage back and forth from jobs or family, but also Egyptians, Syrians, and Lebanese. Indiscriminate retaliatory killing of civilians was, unfortunately, commonplace on both sides.

2. The Six Day War of 1967

The Six Day War of 1967 was a preventive strike launched by Israel in response to Egypt's removal of United Nations forces stationed along her border with Israel, and the subsequent declaration by Gamal Abd-el Nasser of the intention to blockade the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. In the Israeli view, these actions were unprovoked, an affront to their sovereignty, and a threat to the people of Israel. The government of Israel therefore implored the Soviet Union for support; a note was delivered from Prime Minister Eshkol to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Kosygin, to that effect. The Soviet reply placed full responsibility for the war on Israel's shoulders, stating that Israel acted first in the perpetration of aggression against its Arab neighbors, and would have to live with the consequences.

The clumsy attack was a military fiasco for Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq, whose forces were completely neutralized in only six days. The war

opened a new chapter in the history of official Soviet anti-Semitism, however.

E. POST SIX DAY WAR TO GLASNOST

After the war, the authorities ceased to disguise official anti-Semitism, and it acquired full rights. "Zionism became the latest approved scapegoat and authorized object of hatred, just in the way *Nepmen*, wreckers, and *kulaks* had been. In books and periodicals, published in millions of copies, and in movies and television broadcasts, Zionism was depicted as a most serious threat to the Soviet state."²⁰ This idea persisted throughout the seventies and rendered life quite unpleasant for the Soviet Union's own Jews, and especially for the Jewish *refuseniks*, those who had requested permission from the government to emigrate and were denied permission to do so. These people became "tainted"; they were scorned by others, and often lost privileges they had had, such as nice jobs or apartments. Their actions were interpreted by the propaganda machine as proof of their subversive intentions and lack of loyalty to the state,

The 'struggle against Zionism' is an outstanding example of the omnipotence of Soviet ideology. With the aid of quotations from Marx and Lenin, anti-Zionism is presented as a form of class struggle. Soviet ideologists have added a new chapter to Lenin's theory of imperialism as the last stage of capitalism: Zionism as the last stage of imperialism. Within the USSR anti-Zionism is used to mobilize the country's peoples against a common enemy: the Jews. One of the greatest victories of Soviet ideology during the 1970's was the United Nations' resolution pronouncing Zionism to be a form of racism.²¹

Hindsight allows us to see exactly how truth can be so subjective. The Soviets were quite accustomed to practicing their own interpretation of fact. The mutual diplomatic insults which followed came as little surprise, and resulted finally in the following message, delivered to Israeli Ambassador Katz on June 10, 1967 at the Soviet Foreign Ministry:

²⁰ Heller & Nekrich, p. 670.

²¹ Ibid., p. 670-671.

The Government of the Soviet Union announces that, in view of the continued aggression by Israel against Arab states in flagrant violation of the Security Council decision, the Government of the Soviet Union has decided to break off diplomatic relations with Israel.²²

The Israelis counter-accused the Soviets of basing their decisions on Arab propaganda, rather than fact, but accepted the break of relations.

In the end, Moscow completely identified its interests in the Middle East with those of Egypt and Syria," and by a tactical use of the instability in the area and the existence of the Arab-Israeli tension to reduce these Arab countries to an even larger measure of dependence on the Soviet Union.²³ The Soviets were extremely upset over the tremendous losses suffered by Egypt, particularly after having supplied them with massive amounts of money, military advisers, and arms. They were justifiably concerned about the resulting attitude of the Arab peoples regarding the USSR, who felt that they were abandoned by their protector in their hour of need.

The severance of diplomatic relations was, therefore, both an act of wrath and an attempt to prove to the Arabs that the Soviet Union was fully behind them and was working for their good. The replenishment of the Egyptian arsenal, the continuation of badly needed economic assistance to the Arab countries, and the sending of the Red fleet into the Mediterranean Sea were the further proof. They were also steps taken to keep the Middle East in the ferment of tension necessary to further Soviet aims in the area.²⁴

The Soviet Union's decision to sever diplomatic relations with Israel was based on a strange logic; if the Soviets' strategic goal was to wield influence in the Middle Eastern political arena, they had just cut themselves off from a great opportunity. The Soviet Union had already invested a great deal economically, politically, and militarily in the Arab countries, yet their payback was minimal in terms of loyalty or political

²²Dagan, Avigdor. p. 236.

²³Ibid., p. 239.

²⁴Ibid., p. 240.

influence. Severing relations with Israel also left the door wide open for the United States' relationship with Israel to develop. In addition, the Soviets quickly discovered that it was next to impossible to bring any influence to bear on Israel and that they had more or less debarred themselves from participation in the deliberations for any kind of peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Moreover, the Soviets would thereafter find it next to impossible to restore relations with Israel without giving the undesirable impression that a major ideological change had taken place in their foreign policy, should their perceived interests shift back toward Israel in the future.²⁵

It came as no great surprise when the situation between Israel and Egypt began to heat up again. By the spring of 1970 the Egyptians were nearing desperation at the porous condition of their defenses in the escalating War of Attrition which they had initiated against Israel from 1968-1970.

In response, the Soviets escalated their own commitment by installing surface-to-air missiles (SAM-3) sites, manned by Soviet 'advisors', and providing Soviet pilots to fly Egypt's MIG-21 interceptors in combat missions against the Israeli Phantom jets. At this point, there were approximately 20,000 Soviet military personnel stationed in Egypt, and the size of the Mediterranean naval squadron had been increased as well. Clearly the Russians felt that they could not afford to have their clients humiliated, but they also feared that further escalation of the conflict might soon involve them in a direct confrontation with the United States. To avoid this outcome, once the defensive installations were in place, Moscow acquiesced in the American drive for a cease-fire in the War of Attrition; this was achieved in August 1970.²⁶

The Soviets' break with Israel was probably what ultimately doomed their relations with Egypt as well. In September, 1970 the government in Egypt had just changed hands after the death of Nasser. The new President, Anwar Sadat, badly needed a victory in the continuing conflict

²⁵ Laquer, Walter. Forward to Soviet Policy Toward Israel Under Gorbachev, by Robert O. Freedman. New York: Praeger, 1991.

²⁶ Nogee & Donaldson. p.173-174.

with Israel in order to bring stability to the government and galvanize the support of the Egyptian people. Since the Soviets no longer had any influence or any contacts in Israel, Egypt turned to the United States for an interim solution to the conflict. This marked the beginning of increasing American involvement on the Egyptian side of the conflict and a more neutral position for Egypt vis-a-vis the two superpowers.

1. The Yom Kippur War of 1973

Throughout the mid and late seventies the Middle East was seen by the world's superpowers as a potential fuse for a nuclear confrontation. The October 1973 (Yom Kippur) War between Israel and the combined forces of Egypt and Syria was felt to be a powder keg which could have inflicted much more serious damage than the resulting five-month oil embargo against the United States. Despite all the military aid given to Egypt by the Soviet Union during the October War, Egypt was drifting more toward the United States, to the chagrin of the Soviet Union. The Soviet leaders, therefore, may have had some reservations about the desirability of sacrificing détente for the sake of a rather fickle Arab ally.

In his autobiography, In Search of Identity, the late President of Egypt, Anwar Sadat recounts how the Soviets attempted to trick him into accepting a cease-fire after only six and a half hours of fighting, claiming that President Assad of Syria had requested it in a meeting with Soviet leadership. The request was verified by secret message from Sadat to Assad, who denied the entire story.

"It was only after three days of fighting, when it appeared that the Arab side was in fact winning, that the Russians, perhaps sensing the possibility of finally being able to rally the Arabs into the long-advocated 'anti-imperialist' alignment and strike a blow at U.S. interests in the Middle East, moved to increase their involvement in the war, yet at the same time keeping their involvement within limited bounds."²⁷

Since formal relations between Israel and the USSR did not exist during these years, it was via Egypt that the Soviets were able to attempt

²⁷Freedman, Robert. Soviet Policy Toward the Middle East Since 1970. New York: Praeger, 1982. p. 145.

to exert their influence in the area. Egypt, however, did not cooperate; President Sadat terminated the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the two countries in March, 1976. "Sadat had increasingly aligned himself with anti-Soviet forces in the Middle East, even going so far as to approach the Israelis directly in order to freeze the Soviets out of the region. That, presumably, was one of the reasons for Sadat's dramatic visit to Jerusalem in November, 1977."²⁸ This event signified the utter bankruptcy of Moscow's Egyptian policy. This was a source of bitter frustration for Moscow, as it realized that it had shut itself off from Israel in order to cultivate its relations with the Arab countries, who apparently felt neither gratitude nor obligation to maintain close ties with them.

2. The Camp David Accords

The Soviets responded to the Camp David Accords by reinforcing their alliance with Ethiopia, the only remaining country in the Red Sea area with whom they still had good relations. In addition, the Soviets also made one of its periodic gestures to Israel, by inviting a delegation of Israeli parliamentarians from a variety of parties to Moscow for discussions with the Soviet Peace Committee. "In many ways reminiscent of the dispatch of Soviet representatives to Israel at the time of the United States Middle East policy 'reappraisal' in 1975 and Gromyko's private talk with Abba Eban in 1973, it seemed to be a Soviet effort, at a turning point in Middle Eastern affairs, to try to gain Israeli support for the Soviet Middle East peace plan."²⁹ Moscow was trying to placate all sides as it watched its position in the Middle East falling apart.

These steps, however, did not indicate a change in Moscow's formal relations with Israel, referring to Israel in the Soviet press in January, 1980 as the "Zionist Entity." In fact, the Soviets would use the numerous condemnations of Israel by the U.N. in the spring and summer of 1980, condemnations which were initiated by Moscow's Arab allies and to which they added their own sharp invectives, to attempt to divert attention away from Afghanistan where, despite a massive troop

²⁸Nogee & Donaldson. p. 283.

²⁹Freedman, Robert. p. 351.

commitment, the USSR was facing serious difficulties in suppressing the rebels.³⁰

Nevertheless, the Brezhnev government in 1981 reiterated its desire for the Soviet Middle East peace plan to be implemented, which would place the Soviet Union center stage as the diplomatic mediator. Interestingly enough, their plan did recognize Israel and its security needs, in addition to their traditional support for the Palestinians.

F. GLASNOST AND BEYOND

In the early 1980's, the years when the Cold War raged, the Soviet Union drastically reduced the number of Jews it allowed to emigrate. "During the 1970's, the Soviet leadership, primarily for the purpose of improving U.S.-USSR relations, allowed more than 220,000 Jews to emigrate. Initially, the vast majority came to Israel. By the mid-1970's, most Soviet Jewish émigrés were going to the United States, a development that led to a sharp clash between Israeli and U.S. Jewish leaders."³¹

Gorbachev's *perestroika* presented the first opportunity in many years for relations between Israel and the USSR to warm. In this context, Gorbachev decided to initiate a rapprochement with Israel as part of a plan to improve relations with and lessen the threat from the United States. In his new thinking, (Marxist-Leninist) ideology played a less important role in dictating foreign policy, and the Soviet press was freer under *glasnost* to report objectively on both sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The beginning of the rapprochement which occurred in 1985-86 was centered around two key issues: the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel, and an increase in the number of Soviet Jews permitted to leave the USSR. These gestures took place despite recent Israeli actions that bound the Jewish state even more tightly to the United States- for example, Israel's signing of strategic cooperation and free trade

³⁰Ibid., p. 351.

³¹Freedman, Robert. Soviet Policy Toward Israel Under Gorbachev. New York: Praeger, 1991.

agreements with the United States and its agreement to enter into the U.S. Star Wars defense scheme, plus to allow the construction of a Voice of America transmitter on Israeli territory.³²

During talks in August 1985 between the Israeli and Soviet ambassadors to France, the Soviet Union expressed its willingness to consider the re-establishment of relations with Israel if the Israelis would enter into negotiations with Syria regarding a peaceful settlement of the Golan Heights dispute. The Soviets also expressed greater flexibility regarding the issue of Jewish émigrés; the problem of Jewish emigration could be solved in return for an end to the anti-Soviet propaganda which they claimed was being conducted by Israel in the West. They would permit the Jews to leave if they were guaranteed that the Jews would emigrate to Israel, not to the United States, for they feared a brain drain to the West. The Soviet Union confirmed support for Israel's right to exist, and expressed concern over the freeze in the peace process.

These were the reports made public in the West; the Arab world heard a repetition of the Soviets' old position: no recognition without the return of the territory seized in 1967.³³

Much of the progress toward the re-establishment of relations stalled as a result of the escalation in terrorism in the Middle East in 1985-87. There was renewed anger from the Israelis in response to actions by terrorist groups associated with the Palestinian cause, and Israel's reluctance to enter into any kind of peace negotiations with them therefore increased. As the prospects for a peace agreement dimmed, so did the prospects for renewed Soviet-Israeli relations. The government of Shimon Peres took a particularly rigid stance on any concessions which may have helped the process. By the end of 1986 and beginning of 1987, however, Yitzhak Shamir became the Prime Minister and Peres the Foreign Minister, in accordance with the Israeli government's rotation agreement. In early 1987 Shimon Peres began actively working to bring about an international peace conference.

"When he assumed the post of foreign minister in October 1986 (after stepping down as prime minister under the government's

³²Ibid., p. 14.

³³Ibid., p. 16-19.

rotation agreement), Peres began to call for an international conference, which he believed would precipitate new Israeli elections and regain him the post of prime minister... Partly to deflect this pressure, Prime Minister Shamir traveled to the United States in mid-February, where he branded the idea of an international peace conference a 'Soviet-inspired notion supported by radical Arabs.'³⁴

In early 1987 the United States' solid relations in the Middle East were rocked by the Iran-Contra scandal. Moscow seized this opportunity to begin sending clear signals to Israel regarding the re-establishment of relations and to press for a peace conference in which the Soviets could play a central role. Gorbachev seized this opportunity to support Shimon Peres in his talks on behalf of a peace conference with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and members of the European Community. Mutual exchanges of non-diplomatic delegations occurred, and the subsequent media reporting was much less critical than in previous years. Nevertheless, huge debates grew in Israel and the United States over the terms of any possible re-establishment of relations. Most people seemed to be in favor of the rapprochement in principle, but there were too many emotional issues involved which made people wary of being overly confident too soon.

In January 1987 the Soviet Foreign Ministry stated that the resumption of Soviet-Israeli relations would be possible within the process of a Middle East settlement.³⁵ Over the course of the year talks continued. In December, 1987, the *Intifada* (Palestinian Uprising) began, throwing the region into turmoil once again. High-level meetings took place between George Schultz and a line of Middle Eastern leaders, Gorbachev and Arafat, and Shevardnadze and Shamir. Gorbachev had to walk a fine line between Arafat and Shamir, to say just the right things to keep both leaders willing to cooperate and not offend one party by being too sympathetic to the other.

Meanwhile, Moscow was benefiting from a number of developments in the Middle East which seemed to improve the Soviet Union's position among the Arabs. First, since Moscow had declared that it was pulling its

³⁴Ibid., p. 31.

³⁵Ibid., p. 44.

troops out of Afghanistan, there was far less of a perceived Soviet "threat" among the Arabs; secondly, a number of intra-Arab disputes which had plagued Soviet policy were finally being settled, which was also helping to stabilize the region, including Ethiopia & Somalia, Algeria & Morocco, Libya & Chad and Libya & Tunisia. Moscow considered cooperation among these North African states to be important to keep in check the often unpredictable behavior of Qaddafi in Libya. And lastly, Moscow's greatly improved relations with Egypt, which included a new agreement on economic cooperation.³⁶

G. RELATIONS ARE RE-ESTABLISHED

Throughout 1989 and 1990, economic, diplomatic, cultural, and humanitarian gestures increased greatly, and talks between the two countries continued, as the quest for a Middle East peace progressed. Meanwhile, Hungary re-established relations with Israel, and many people both inside and outside the government were calling for the same move for the USSR. The United States began limiting the number of Jewish immigrants it would accept as refugees, a long-standing Soviet request.

In the final four months of the USSR's existence, following the abortive coup d'état in August, 1991, the greatest strides were taken in improving Soviet-Israeli relations. As the Union split apart, Israel strove to maintain the improving relations with Russia that it had had with the Soviet Union. Moscow finally voted to repeal the United Nations policy of "Zionism is Racism." Direct airline services were established from Moscow and St. Petersburg to Tel Aviv to facilitate emigration of Russian Jews following an agreement between Aeroflot and El Al. Full diplomatic relations were re-established on October 18, 1991, two weeks before the Middle East peace conference which convened in Madrid.³⁷

The road since that time has not been without its obstacles; Russia and the newly independent states all have a myriad of problems to face. But

³⁶Ibid., p. 54.

³⁷Freedman, Robert. Working Paper: "Israeli-Russian Relations Since the Collapse of the Soviet Union". Baltimore Hebrew University, 1994.

despite the challenges, historic steps are being made. On April 24, 1994, Yitzhak Rabin arrived in Moscow, for the first visit ever of an Israeli Prime Minister to Russia. The signs continue to be positive for the continuance of improving relations between the two very influential countries.

III. DOMESTIC POLITICS ANALYSIS

This chapter will discuss the various internal political factors, first in Russia, and then in Israel, which affected the rapprochement between the two countries. Each section will be broken down into the relevant issues which affected each country, with a brief look at the development of each specific issue.

A. RUSSIA

1. Political Situation

The government of Boris Yeltsin finds itself today in a quite different situation than did the government of several years earlier. Eager to maintain its image as a world power and simultaneously feed its people, Russia's leadership has had to find the delicate balance of winning the approval of the West in order to continue receiving vital economic aid, while at the same time maintaining the support of the majority of its own government, to include members of the right wing.

In the pre-Gorbachev era, relations between the Soviet Union and Israel were based on the maintenance of hostility, which in turn furthered the Arab-Israeli conflict. Such a situation "enhanced the importance of the Soviet Union as an arms supplier and a source of diplomatic support to the Arabs and further strengthened its position in the Middle East."³⁸ The two countries were continually at odds with one another due to the USSR's close ties with Israel's enemies, namely Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and the PLO. Although Israel repeatedly called upon the Soviet Union to re-establish diplomatic relations, the Soviets insisted that no such relationship would be established unless the Israelis withdrew all of their forces from the territory seized in the 1967 war. The issue of Soviet Jewry was also a wedge which continued to separate the two countries.

In deciding upon a strategy for the Middle East, Moscow had to deal with some formidable challenges. The situation was particularly complicated because of the numerous inter-Arab and regional conflicts,

³⁸Freedman, Robert, Soviet Policy(Gorbachev), p. 5.

which usually meant that when the Soviets favored one party, it would alienate another. Second, local communist parties tended to damage relations between the USSR and that state, as the interests of Moscow and the state in question inevitably diverged. Third, the bond of economic dependence between the Arab countries and the USSR was weakened by the oil wealth which flowed in after the increase in oil prices in 1973-74. Fourth, the resurgence of Islam put Moscow, with their policy of official atheism, at a distinct disadvantage in the highly religious Middle East, especially after their invasion of Afghanistan in 1980. Fifth, since the USSR had no relations with Israel, the United States was the only superpower able to address both sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and thus gained a competitive edge as the world's peacemaker. Finally, the United States, France, and to a lesser extent China all opposed Moscow's attempts to predominate in the region, which often enabled the Middle Eastern states to play the great powers off against one another so that no one would have dominance.³⁹

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russo-Israeli relations look quite different. Exactly what changes have taken place and why did they happen?

Gorbachev had to decide on a new course of action to suit the changing world. In his book, Soviet Foreign Policy Under Gorbachev, Robert O. Freedman outlines four major factors responsible for the improvement in Russo-Israeli relations during Gorbachev's tenure in office: first was the Middle Eastern political situation; Moscow sought, of course, to maximize its own political position in the region, and Gorbachev felt that participation in a peace conference which would bring about the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict would be the best way to accomplish this. He realized that establishing a dialogue with Israel would be necessary in order to coax the Israelis to the bargaining table. The political scenario was further complicated by the break between King Hussein of Jordan and Yasir Arafat, in addition to the rise in terrorism at that time. Second, Gorbachev sought to influence public opinion in the United States. With his major economic and political reforms underway, "Gorbachev clearly wanted to slow down the arms race to free resources

³⁹Ibid., p. 3-4.

for the lagging Soviet economy." Gorbachev therefore surmised that establishing positive relations with Israel would improve the Soviets' image in the United States and make them appear less of a threat; this would precipitate arms control benefits as well as possible trade benefits. Third, there were possible trade benefits to be reaped from direct Soviet-Israeli trade, which could provide a means whereby some shortages could be alleviated. Israeli technology in agriculture would be of particular use to the Central Asian republics, who had the potential to be of great value to the Soviet food supply. Finally, the impact of Soviet public opinion was becoming a factor in the formation of foreign policy, if only a minor one. Although a great deal of anti-Semitism still existed at the level of the man-in-the-street, Soviet citizens in general were beginning to acquire a more positive view of Israel as a result of Israel's assistance to the USSR on several humanitarian missions.⁴⁰

The first precursor of change in relations was the major policy change of *glasnost* under Mikhail Gorbachev; this new thinking allowed a freedom of the press, to report objectively- which set the stage for attacking one of the roots of the poor relations between Russia and Israel, traditional anti-Semitism.

2. Anti-Semitism

No one denies the institutionalized anti-Semitism which existed in the Soviet Union. Popular attitudes have also changed in accordance with the intensity of the campaigns of any given government- from Stalin's ferocity to Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's tolerance. There are several possible explanations for these "propaganda zigzags."⁴¹ First, the propaganda may have had different goals for different audiences. American Jews would have heard one message, while third-world states another; these campaigns would also play out very differently in the various republics of the USSR, where the different levels of anti-Semitism could explain the

⁴⁰Ibid., p. xv-xvi.

⁴¹Drachman, Edward. Challenging the Kremlin: The Soviet Jewish Movement for Freedom, 1967-1990. New York: Paragon House, 1992. p. 102.

intensity of the articles published there. Secondly, there may have been disagreement within the Soviet leadership itself over the Jewish Question.

Thus at times, such as in the early 1970's, the Kremlin published its approval of emigration for reunification to enhance chances that détente would succeed. But at other times, such as the 1980's, it announced emigration was virtually over because it felt that too many Jews were leaving, a more liberalized emigration policy had not won them the diplomatic gains they had sought and dissident activities had grown too strong and potentially dangerous.⁴²

A third explanation is that the Soviets wanted to hedge on anti-Semitism, with the division of propagandists into hard-liners and soft-liners, the latter being just as damaging due to the subtlety of their attacks. Finally, it is possible that Soviet thinking had truly gone through a change under *glasnost*, signaling the rejection of anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist propaganda; this propaganda could no longer be successfully promulgated as the propaganda machine disintegrated under *glasnost*.

Although the overall trend in the expression of anti-Semitism in the post-Soviet era has been decreasing, there have been backslides since the beginning of the rapprochement, notably after the rise to prominence of the ultra nationalist right-wing leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky in June, 1991. However, since the beginning of *glasnost*, several distinct changes became evident in the Soviet press. More Jewish names began to appear as writers in the Soviet media, rather than using Russian-sounding pseudonyms. More items also appeared in the media of Jewish interest. On March 11, 1987, *Literaturnaya Gazeta* published a story about the Jewish Studio Theater in Moscow, written by Nina Yelekhova. "Soviet citizens should not be isolated from one another," argued the author, "by the section of their internal passport that designates nationality." This was quite a breakthrough, as the Kremlin had never before admitted publicly that the nationality line on the passport had ever before caused divisiveness.⁴³

⁴²Ibid., p. 102-103.

⁴³Ibid., p. 103.

3. Political Rhetoric

The beginning manifestations of this change, the change in the press coverage of Israel, was followed by unofficial talks between Soviet and Israeli representatives at locations abroad. At a meeting in Paris, the Israeli Ambassador to France, Ovadia Sofer met with his Soviet counterpart, Yuli Vorontsov in July, 1985. They tentatively discussed the necessary preconditions for the re-establishment of diplomatic relations, to include a partial Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, and a liberal Soviet policy for the emigration of Soviet Jews wishing to leave. Ambassador Sofer then requested that a meeting be held between Vice Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and his new Soviet counterpart. The content of this private meeting was leaked to the Israeli press, and caused a great deal of anger in the Arab world, especially in Syria.⁴⁴

There was a recognizable change in the political rhetoric in the Soviet Union; articles also began to appear in the Soviet press which portrayed Israel in a favorable light. This change was first demonstrated in 1987 and generally continued through 1990. When disaster struck the Soviet Union in the form of a major train accident on the Trans-Siberian railway, Israel offered medical assistance for the burn victims of the crash, and a team of Israeli doctors, together with specially developed medications and synthetic skin, was sent to Moscow. Upon their return home, Georgy Martirosov, head of the Soviet Consulate in Israel, praised the efforts of the doctors, claiming that they had not only saved lives but helped foster an atmosphere of positive relations between the two countries.⁴⁵ A similar incident of humanitarian assistance occurred in the wake of the devastating Armenian earthquake of 1988. Sixty-one people were flown to Israel for specialized treatment on the first El Al plane ever to make a flight to the USSR. Both of these events were covered by the Soviet press, which praised Israel and planted the seeds in the public consciousness of the possibility of a friendly relationship between the two countries.

There was also a substantial drop in the volume of anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist propaganda in the media. "Certain publications like *Nedelya*,

⁴⁴Ibid. p. 17.

⁴⁵Freedman, Robert. Soviet Policy(Gorbachev). p. 75.

the weekly supplement to *Izvestia*, began to criticize anti-Semitism in the USSR. Until then these publications had regularly printed anti-Semitic diatribes. The major newspapers, *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, also began to oppose anti-Semitism in 1987. At the same time, however, anti-Semitic articles increased in frequency and intensity in some local newspapers, such as *Leningradskaya Pravda*.⁴⁶ Anti-Semitism came to be associated with anti-reform political forces and their mass media outlets.

The media was reflecting the general change in tenor in government policy.

Soviet policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict moved from an uncritical embrace of radical Arab positions to a much more even-handed view, eventually not that different from the position of the European Community and even the United States: support for Israel's existence within secure and recognized borders, resolution of the territorial issue on the basis of direct talks between Israel and the Arab states, opposition to Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, and a solution to the Palestinian question on the basis of Palestinian self-determination.⁴⁷

In conjunction with the decline of Israel-bashing in the Soviet press, came its complement- articles of greater objectivity, which did not always portray the Arab countries as guilt-free. Equal responsibility for finding a solution to the quest for peace was placed on the Arab countries, instead of merely dwelling on the "injustices" imposed upon them by Israel. An *Izvestia* article of December 30, 1988, for example, criticized a meeting of Islamic fundamentalists who were planning to wage a jihad (holy war) against Israel and the Damascus-based PLO factions that were trying to undermine Arafat's leadership in the PLO.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Drachman, Edward. p. 104.

⁴⁷Avineri, Shlomo. "Israel and the End of the Cold War: the Shadow has Faded," *Brookings Review*, Spring 1993, vol. 11, n2.

⁴⁸Freedman, Robert. Soviet Policy(Gorbachev), p. 65.

4. Diplomacy

Diplomatic talks continued during the years in between, 1986-87, by various representatives of the two countries. The USSR, while giving certain indications of the desire for a rapprochement, continued to condemn Israel on many fronts. These clashes continued between the two countries on a state-to-state level; however, beneath the surface there was a great improvement in Israeli-Soviet ties in areas such as cultural, religious, and humanitarian relations. 1988-89 marked the beginning of the blossoming of cultural relations, despite the difficulties endured with establishing relations at the national level.

In addition to humanitarian assistance, sub-governmental relations of all types blossomed in the spring and summer of 1989. For the first time since 1967, Israelis were allowed to visit the USSR on tourist visas; an Israeli journalist delegation traveled to the USSR on an official invitation; and Israeli and Soviet rabbis exchanged visits...The Soviet Union opened up its archives on the Holocaust to Israeli researchers; the Israeli Philharmonic orchestra was invited to play in Moscow and Leningrad; Israeli films were shown at the Moscow film festival for the first time....⁴⁹

In addition, teaching exchanges were established, Soviet groups reciprocated with visits to Israel, and in September, 1989, the Bolshoi Ballet arrived in Israel for an historic performance.⁵⁰

Israel began to increase its contacts with the other republics of the USSR, with athletic and cultural delegations from Estonia, Lithuania, Azerbaijan, and Georgia exchanging visits. These republics were all seeking greater freedom in trade and autonomy from Moscow, and occasionally ran into difficulties in this regard, as was the case with Israeli Agriculture Minister Avraham Katz-Oz, who had been invited to attend a flower exhibition in Estonia, but was denied a Soviet visa.⁵¹

Although the USSR made some headway in the pursuit of a solution to the Middle East peace problem, notably after talks between Shevardnadze

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁵⁰ Helen Kaye, *Jerusalem Post*, September 11, 1989.

⁵¹ Freedman, Robert. Soviet Policy(Gorbachev), p. 77.

and Mubarak in 1989, the Soviet Union continued to falter in its efforts to lure Israel to the negotiating table. This reluctance on Israel's part is largely due to the Soviets' continued call for an international peace conference in which the PLO would be participating as the representative of the Palestinian people.

Israel was also reluctant to respond to Gorbachev's 1989-1990 moves toward closer relations because of the USSR's continued actions in support of countries perceived to be a real threat to Israel's security; the Soviet Union's sale of SU-24 fighter-bombers to Libya, for example, a country still pledged to the destruction of Israel, perturbed the Israelis greatly,⁵² and cast doubts on the sincerity of Moscow's desire for a rapprochement.

In the early 1990's the pace of the contact between Israel and many of the republics and former republics of the USSR was increasing rapidly. One month after abortive coup in August, 1991, the USSR reversed its position on the United Nations declaration that "Zionism is Racism." This was facilitated by the removal of several of the old conservative hard-liners in the wake of the coup attempt. Speaking at the United Nations on September 25, 1991, Boris Pankin, the new Soviet Foreign Minister stated:

The philosophy of new international solidarity signifies, as confirmed in practice, the de-ideologizing of the U.N. Our organization has been renewed and it is imperative that once and for all it rejects the legacy of the 'Ice Age' in which Zionism was compared with racism in an odious resolution.⁵³

On April 10, 1992 Kazakhstan established diplomatic relations with Israel after the visit of the Israeli ambassador to Alma-Ata. This visit was followed by that of Simcha Dinitz, President of the World Jewish Congress who met with Kazakh President Nazarbaev to discuss business and banking ties.⁵⁴ Later that month Russian Vice-President Alexander Rutskoi, then still an ally of Yeltsin, traveled to Israel. In a statement made upon his arrival, he declared that, "We consider Israel to be a very important place because of all the Russians who now live here," and later, "Israel and Russia have a great opportunity for the development of mutual

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 74-75.

⁵³the New York Times, September 25, 1991.

⁵⁴Bess Brown, RFE/RL Report, 14 April, 1992.

cooperation and a blossoming relationship.⁵⁵ While differences still existed over the issue of emigration, bilateral relations improved as a result of the Rutskoi visit, during which a memorandum of understanding was signed regarding agriculture and business.⁵⁶ Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres met with similar success in Central Asia in July, 1994, after agreements were reached with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan covering air traffic, tourism, mutual protection of investments.⁵⁷

Diplomatic relations were finally re-established between Israel and the Soviet Union in October, 1991, during the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres. Although the Soviet Union would cease to exist only several months later, the diplomatic tie which the emerging country of Russia would inherit had basically been established in the midst of the transition away from the Soviet Union, which had not existed in its true sense for a long while.

The re-establishment of relations was, as was reported by *Izvestia* on October 14, also in conjunction with the visit to the Soviet Union of a large delegation of Israeli business representatives who were eager to expand business relations. According to a TASS report regarding the meeting, "Peres has close links with business circles in his country that are interested in expanding cooperation with the Soviet Union."⁵⁸

All of these events set the stage for the April 1994 visit of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to Moscow, an historical event which confirmed the vast political change which has occurred between the two countries. Rabin indicated to the press his desire to establish a dialogue with the top Russian leadership, "so that this activity will be in the framework of the two superpowers." He also stated that he sought to clarify Israel's position to the Russian leadership with the intention that Russia could play a positive role, "as it has done in Yugoslavia."⁵⁹ In addition, Rabin was seeking public assurances from high Russian officials that they would act against recent manifestations of anti-Semitism, and the prospects for

⁵⁵Dan Izenburg, *Jerusalem Post*, April 30, 1992.

⁵⁶Freedman, Robert. Working Paper: "Israeli-Russian Relations Since the Collapse of the Soviet Union," Baltimore Hebrew University, November, 1994.

⁵⁷Bess Brown, RFE/RL Reports, 5-6 July, 1994.

⁵⁸TASS, 2 October, 1991 (FBIS: USSR, 3 October, 1991, p. 4)

⁵⁹Reuters, *The New York Times*, April 23, 1994.

advancing the Middle East peace talks, which Moscow was co-sponsoring along with the United States.⁶⁰

The changes in policy which have taken place indicate the depth of ideological change in Moscow. There were new priorities; maintaining the rivalry of the superpowers with the United States was certainly no longer one of them. The domestic political factors which played a role in the Russo-Israeli rapprochement were indeed quite significant. An atmosphere of desperation had befallen the Soviet Union, their system doomed because of its inability to meet the constantly growing demands of its own ruling elite, not to mention the needs of subsistence of the average citizen. In fact, when Gorbachev decided to re-establish relations with Israel in 1991, he did so under great internal political pressures at home.

In the aftermath of the abortive coup, major changes were taking place in the USSR. The individual republics, led by Russia under Boris Yeltsin became increasingly assertive, the Baltic states were given permission to leave the USSR, and Gorbachev found himself in a far weaker political position. The Soviet leader, over the next few months, was to strive to arrange a new union agreement, which would preserve his position as the country's leader, but he was to run into increasing opposition from both Yeltsin and the leader of the Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk.⁶¹

Gorbachev was struggling to maintain his political footing in a country that was crumbling around him. The liberals had been advocating the re-establishment of relations with Israel for quite some time, while the conservatives were strongly opposed to it. "It would thus appear that the Soviet media reports dealing with the decision to resume diplomatic relations with Israel were aimed, at least in part, at convincing otherwise reluctant members of the Soviet elite and population that the resumption of diplomatic relations with Israel would serve to aid the USSR's increasingly faltering economy as well as satisfying the United States."⁶² Aligning himself more closely with the foreign policy of the United States,

⁶⁰Erlanger, Steven. The New York Times, April 26, 1994.

⁶¹Freedman, Robert. Working Paper: Israeli-Russian Relations, p. 2.

⁶²Ibid., p. 4.

particularly vis-a-vis the Middle East, Gorbachev was in a more favorable position to request economic aid, of critical importance to his own political survival. In a reorientation of Soviet policy in the Middle East, Moscow campaigned alongside the United States to co-sponsor a peace conference which would not only reconfirm the Soviet Union's prestige and status as a world power, but also prove that Gorbachev was still in control.

5. Soviet Jewry

Meanwhile, one manifestation of the rapprochement was the growing success in the Soviet Jewish movement for freedom. This was a highly political and emotionally charged issue, involving not only Israel and the Soviet Union, but the United States as well. Moscow had long feared a "brain-drain" to the West, particularly to the U.S. Since the rivalry of the two superpowers was no longer a concern, and Yeltsin had his hands full dealing with other issues, worrying about a threat from the United States became no longer so important. It is in this scenario of Russia's struggle for basic survival that Moscow has become much more flexible regarding the emigration of her Jewish population.

Human rights activists and human rights-oriented political leaders, as well as leaders of Jewish groups have for many years lobbied strongly to advance the cause of freedom for the Russian and Soviet Jews denied permission to emigrate. The freedom to emigrate was used as a tool by Soviet leadership to control the population and eliminate potentially destabilizing social elements. In this way, the Soviet technique of managing instability by allowing certain select elements of society to emigrate also was useful for propaganda purposes, "winning points" for the government's "benevolence" and "respect for the individual," whenever the numbers were on the rise.

The emigration of Soviet Jewry has been simultaneously both a political issue and a symptom of the political climate in the USSR, primarily vis-a-vis Soviet relations with the West, although it was the official policy of the Soviet Union to deny any link between economic and trade relations with the United States and Soviet Jewish emigration, as was reiterated by *Pravda* on December 19, 1974, on the occasion of the passage of the controversial Jackson-Vanik Amendment by the United

States Congress, a provision of the 1974 Trade Act which linked granting the Soviet Union most-favored-nation status to a more liberal Soviet policy toward emigration.

Détente with the West, specifically U.S.-Soviet relations, formed the backdrop for emigration during the 1970's. If viewed in isolation, the linkage the barometer thesis establishes between détente and emigration seems plausible, for Jewish emigration levels rose in the early 1970's as U.S.-Soviet relations grew warmer... Soviet negotiators undoubtedly realized that increased emigration fostered good relations and a more relaxed international atmosphere, and could thus be used as a concession to advance the goals of détente.⁶³

One should not go so far as to simply attribute the increase in Jewish emigration to the thaw in U.S.-Soviet relations as the solitary cause, however, although the United States had indeed been urging the Soviets throughout the 1970's and 80's to exercise more leniency in letting people emigrate who desired to do so. If one believes that an increase in emigration was allowed in 1987 solely in order to better U.S.-Soviet relations prior to the December 1987 Reagan-Gorbachev summit, one must then question why emigration of this magnitude did not occur prior to either the 1985 summit meeting in Geneva or the 1986 summit in Reykjavik. The decision to allow increased emigration was based on a strategy not only for improving U.S.-Soviet relations, but also for dealing with the tremendous political pressures and social dynamics occurring inside the Soviet Union during the late 1980's.

After the first two years of Gorbachev's time in office, during which there was a strict clampdown on emigration and subsequently little hope for approval and few applicants, there was a great turnaround in policy. In contrast to the previously decreasing numbers of emigrants; in 1987, 8,155 Jews were allowed to emigrate; this number consisted largely of refuseniks whose cases were finally being resolved. In 1988 the number jumped to 18,965, and consisted mostly of first-time emigration applicants. In 1989 emigration took a tremendous leap, with 71,196 Jews departing the

⁶³ Salitan, Laurie. Politics and Nationality in Contemporary Soviet-Jewish Emigration, 1968-89. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. p. 85.

Soviet Union. There was also a significant number of Soviet Germans who were allowed to emigrate during these years.⁶⁴

Allowing the refuseniks to emigrate meant that the USSR could begin to rid itself of a large group of emigration activists whose skills were already lost to the Soviet Union (since most refuseniks had been dismissed from their jobs after filing emigration applications). Emigration of the refuseniks also enabled the Soviet Union to reduce the number of divided families actively seeking reunification, a problem it had committed to resolve by signing the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.⁶⁵

Today the question of Jewish emigration remains an important issue in Russo- Israeli relations. Immigrants may now fly directly to Israel from Russia and many other places. With the economic systems doing so poorly and the uncertain political future there, Jews from the former Soviet Union have been emigrating to Israel in record numbers. This phenomenon has been even more true since the United States began restricting the numbers of Jews it would accept from the former Soviet Union and imposing stiffer limits on immigration, since few could still qualify for asylum by claiming persecution for religious reasons. Thus, Jewish emigrants have fewer choices of destinations. More than 500,000 of them have emigrated from the former Soviet Union to Israel since 1989, raising the population in Israel by more than 10%. Immigration peaked at 200,000 in 1990 and 176,000 in 1991, and slowed to 80,000 in 1992 and about 60,000 in 1993, as news traveled home about hardships in Israel. In general, these immigrants have a higher standard of education and training than the native population. However, in a country that was already suffering from an unemployment problem, such a heavy influx of people seeking mid- to high-level jobs can create serious problems.⁶⁶

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁶⁶"A Coat of Many Colours." *The Economist*. January 22, 1994. p. II10.

6. Public Opinion

Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* enabled Soviet citizens to take a fresh look at their own system, and many found it to be lacking. The openness and honesty which began to fill the newspapers in the late 1980's fueled a discontent which has been growing since that time. Public opinion has come to play an increasingly important role in today's Russian politics, as citizens are no longer forbidden from expressing opinions contrary to the government's policy, and politicians now realize that their positions are not guaranteed by the Communist Party, but dependent upon the support of their own constituents.

The primary factor which appears responsible for the way public opinion is formed is economics. With the average monthly wage in early 1994 at around \$87 per month, and that being eleven times what it was in January 1992,⁶⁷ the Russian people have been emerging from a period of great economic uncertainty and frustration. With greater exposure to the West and a growing awareness of how poor off they are in comparison to western countries, public opinion has taken two main courses: either embracing the West and longing for a closer relationship which could reap benefits at home, the course that has been pursued by Boris Yeltsin, or the bitter rejectionism of western institutions and a desire to find the answer from within Russia, placing the blame on "foreign" elements. This latter, more radical view is typified by the neo-Fascist leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky.

Russians manifested their desire for stability when they voted for Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party in the December 1993 elections, where he won nearly a quarter of the vote.

Rising discontent about Russia's declining economic condition increased Zhirinovsky's appeal between the 1991 and 1993 elections, and as the economy continues to falter, Russian commentators suggest that his appeal will continue to grow. His base of support consists of well-educated young males from larger cities, older less-educated males from smaller cities,

⁶⁷"Don't Panic." The New Republic. January 10, 1994. p. 9.

disgruntled rural residents and numerous members of the Russian armed forces.⁶⁸

The choice was perceived as being solely between Yeltsin and Zhirinovsky, since the Communist Party, although it did receive quite a few votes, had lost its credibility and the campaign of reformers such as the Russia's Choice Party was ineffective. Some believe that the quasi-Nazi attitude of Zhirinovsky can only be countered by effective economic resolutions and a transitory abstention from democracy.⁶⁹

Zhirinovsky has rekindled in Russia a new wave of anti-Semitism, part of his platform of neo-imperialism (including expansionism and racism) which has attracted a broad spectrum of popular support. This was denied, however, by Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, during his discussions with Yitzhak Rabin in Moscow; he stated that, "no Zhirinovsky will be able to incite a serious upsurge in anti-Semitism in Russia. I can tell you unequivocally that this will not happen."⁷⁰ Even under the Soviet government there was a latent anti-Jewish sentiment among many Soviet citizens, thanks to the strong negative impact of more than seventy years of anti-Zionist propaganda.

Since the caustic ultranationalist Vladimir V. Zhirinovsky rode xenophobia and economic fears to win [in the December elections], the scarcely dormant fears of Russian Jews have been reawakened, and more have expressed an interest in emigrating. Mr. Zhirinovsky, of Jewish stock on his father's side, has made intermittent anti-Semitic remarks, though he denies being anti-Semitic.⁷¹

Zhirinovsky has utilized an age-old tactic for rallying support- targeting a scapegoat for the country's ills, blaming "someone else" for the loss of the nation's former "days of glory," and advocating an ethnically pure Russian state with the most powerful army in the world. He pledged to put an end to Russia's "national humiliation" by granting privileges to businessmen to

⁶⁸Kipp, Jacob. "The Zhirinovsky Threat." Foreign Affairs. May/June 1994. p. 74.

⁶⁹"The Bell Has Tolled: Even Louder Than We Wanted." The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press. January 12, 1994. p. 14.

⁷⁰Erlanger, Steven. The New York Times. April 26, 1994.

⁷¹Ibid.

counter foreign competition, to increase arms exports, and to provide husbands to unwed women and cheap vodka for all.⁷² Having placed third in the Russian presidential elections of June, 1991, Zhirinovsky actually managed to send "volunteers" from his party to aid Iraq in its confrontation with "the United States and Israel."⁷³

In a survey of public opinion conducted by the Soviet Center for Public Opinion and Market Research in conjunction with the American Jewish Committee throughout the former Soviet Union in late 1990 and later again throughout the Commonwealth of Independent States in the spring of 1992 (including Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan) plus the three Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, certain trends became detectable in public opinion towards ethnicity, minorities, and Jews in particular. (Not to mention the fact that the mere existence of such an institution devoted to this purpose gives clear indication of the changing times.) Yet some of these trends manifested in the surveys seem to contradict and oppose one another.

The attitudes are not monolithic, in fact, they vary significantly depending on the particular state involved as well as the issue in question. Out of a total of 144 questions in 1992, 34 were about attitudes toward Jews. Based on the average change per question for those items appearing in both the 1990 and the 1992 surveys, the overall trend with regard to popular attitudes toward Jews is generally negative, demonstrating an increase in anti-Jewish hostility- with the exceptions of in the Ukraine and Moldova, where the overall trend has been toward the positive. In Russia in particular, the average change per item (-3 points) is largely unchanged.

The largest shifts in opinion in a negative direction appear when respondents were asked about various types of contact with Jews and about equal rights for Jews as an ethnic group. (The overall perceived trend, "Do you believe that anti-Semitism has increased or decreased in your republic ?" has been that it has decreased in Russia, Kazakhstan, and Moldova, however.) These views, however, are largely less critical than the prejudice toward other indigenous Soviet minority groups, including

⁷²Kipp, Jacob. p. 74.

⁷³Freedman, Robert. Working Paper: Israeli-Russian Relations. p. 12.

Gypsies, Armenians, Chechens and others.⁷⁴ Despite this negative trend, there is still widespread belief in equal rights, fair treatment, and the virtues of Jews as individuals.⁷⁵

Positive opinion changes in Russia include the perception that Jews are hard workers (from 45% agreement in 1990 to 53% in 1992), kind and peaceful (from 36% to 41%); Zionism was also viewed as less of a threat, moving away from the earlier perception that Zionism was a policy for establishing the world supremacy of the Jews, from 21% to 17%.⁷⁶

In 1990, the question was asked, "Do you think that the Soviet Union should or shouldn't renew diplomatic relations with Israel?" The response was overwhelmingly positive across the board.⁷⁷ In the 1992 survey this question was redundant. However, when asked in 1992 about the Middle East conflict, whether they felt more sympathy with the Arabs or the Israelis, the majority of respondents in each of the ten states except Estonia answered with the Arabs. Furthermore, when asked if they sympathized more with the Palestinians or the Israelis, in every country except Estonia, the Palestinians were favored among the respondents who were willing to make the choice.⁷⁸ Views about Zionism and Israel have generally become more negative in the Islamic states of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan, who have been experiencing the growth of inter ethnic tensions in the past few years and experiencing a resurgence of Islam throughout the formerly secular central Asian republics.

7. Bureaucratic Structure

The change in the bureaucratic structure throughout Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union is another important factor in explaining the

⁷⁴Gudkov, Lev and Alex Levinson. Working Paper: "Attitudes Toward Jews in the Commonwealth of Independent States." New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1994.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 7.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 10-11.

⁷⁷Gudkov, Lev and Alex Levinson. Working Paper: "Attitudes Toward Jews in the Soviet Union: Public Opinion in Ten Republics." New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1991.

⁷⁸Gudkov & Levinson, CIS.

change in tenor of government policy. Prior to the abortive coup in August, 1991, there remained in office many "old-school" Communists, staunchly conservative members of the government who were not supportive of Gorbachev's reforms and political ideas, to include the rapprochement with Israel. The coup attempt gave Gorbachev an ideal excuse to expel these individuals from the political machine; this included some of his close associates. Throughout the Soviet *nomenklatura*, the people were given the opportunity to vote out of office those individuals who were perceived to be corrupt and self-serving.

Some individuals who were Communist Party members and remain in office have changed their beliefs; some were never really Communists in the first place except in name. Meanwhile others claim a new party affiliation, but retain all of their old communist beliefs and practices. Enough of each kind remain today to create controversy for President Yeltsin.

The period between the abortive coup in August 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 was indeed the period of the most rapid change in Russo-Israeli relations. Gorbachev did not rush into the establishment of relations directly after the coup attempt, nor was he pushing the rapprochement prior to the coup attempt.

In the year prior to the abortive coup, Gorbachev moved to the right politically, a process punctuated by Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's December 1990 resignation in protest to Gorbachev's policies. The conservative forces whose views were being publicly espoused by such Soviet newspapers as *Pravda* and *Sovietskaya Rossiya*, were negatively disposed toward Israel, and this may have been one of the reasons why Gorbachev delayed raising the level of diplomatic relations with Israel to the full ambassadorial status, and opposed the 'Zionism as Racism' resolution. With the power of the conservatives in eclipse after the coup, however, Gorbachev was freer to move on relations with Israel.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Freedman, Robert, Working Paper: Israeli-Russian Relations. p. 1-2.

B. ISRAEL

1. Political Situation

The change in the political tide in Israel also facilitated the rapprochement with Russia. As it was the Soviets who broke off relations with Israel in 1967, it was the Soviets who had to decide to approach Israel about the re-establishment of relations. The Israelis had consistently demonstrated a willingness to talk and to work with the Soviets towards this goal.

As opposed to Israel's earlier years under the strong conservative leadership of personalities like Menachem Begin, the Likud-led National Unity government under Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, which was established at the end of 1988, met with constant opposition from the more conciliatory Labor party, which was more willing to be flexible in negotiating for peace with the Palestinian people. The Labor Party, in turn, was frequently attacked by the Likud for being "soft" on the PLO.

The real divisive issue was the question of a Middle East peace conference, to be sponsored either by the Soviets (and later the Russians), the United States, or both, and supported by a number of other countries. These efforts ultimately culminated in the Madrid Conference of October, 1991 which laid the foundation for Arab-Israeli talks. Some were adamantly opposed to this idea, such as Yitzhak Shamir, who criticized the plan for an international conference as "national suicide"⁸⁰; while others were in favor of the plan but argued over its terms. This disagreement precipitated a political battle with Shimon Peres (Labor), the former Prime Minister and current Foreign Minister, and Yitzhak Shamir (Likud). His government did gain greater support during the Intifada, (the Palestinian uprising) which began in December, 1987 and lasted until the beginning of the Gulf Crisis. Israel's National Unity government became wrought with internal contradictions between Labor and Likud over the peace process, and there was disagreement within Likud itself over the role that Moscow should be permitted to play in Middle East diplomacy.

⁸⁰ Freedman, Robert. Soviet Policy (Gorbachev). p. 37.

These factors contributed to the weakening of the National Unity government, which collapsed in mid-March, 1990.

From the viewpoint of the Shamir government, the collapse of the Soviet Union in December, 1991 brought forth four major concerns: first was the fear that the nuclear weapons belonging to various states of the former Soviet Union might be sold to Israel's enemies, such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, or Libya, given the economically dire straits in which most of the new states found themselves, or that nuclear scientists from these states might be persuaded into working for these countries. Secondly, the Israeli government was quite concerned that there might be an interruption in the Jewish emigration to Israel, that the agreement made by Gorbachev might not be honored under a new government. Third, Israeli leaders were concerned that the favorable political position it enjoyed with the Soviet Union, with whom it had re-established diplomatic relations only two months earlier, might be jeopardized, and that the situation was rendered even more uncertain with the emergence of six new Islamic states: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tadzhikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kirghizistan. And finally, Israel hoped to not only maintain but even develop the bilateral relations in the areas of trade and culture not only with Russia, but the other newly independent states as well.⁸¹

The next real turning point in Israeli politics was the defeat of the Likud party in the elections of June, 1992, and the advent of a Labor government led by Yitzhak Rabin. Said to preside over one of the most dovish governments since the war of 1967, there were indeed very bright prospects for an Israeli peace accord with the Palestinians, which would greatly facilitate a rapprochement with anyone supportive of them, as the Russians had been. This development would allow Russia to maintain her integrity as a supporter of the Palestinians and their fellow Arabs and simultaneously work toward closer relations with Israel, since Israel was working for and willing to make peace with the Palestinians. This was, according to Russia, an important prerequisite.

⁸¹Freedman, Robert. Working Paper: Israeli-Russian Relations. p. 8-9.

2. The Palestinians

On September 13, 1993 at the White House, a Declaration of Principles was signed by PLO Executive Committee Chairman Yasir Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, in the presence of U.S. President Bill Clinton, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev and other governmental officials, guaranteeing to the Palestinian people, represented by the PLO, their rights to an interim self-government arrangement in the Gaza Strip and in Jericho. This major event was largely heralded in the West as well as in Russia, but met with divided opinion in the Arab world; some groups supported Arafat and the Palestine National Council's policy of cooperation with Israel, while others, notoriously the radical *Hamas*' terrorist organization, felt that Arafat had betrayed the Palestinian people by settling for anything less than their ultimate goal—the establishment of a Palestinian state via the destruction of the state of Israel.

Meanwhile, Israel's relations with Russia were expanding on many fronts, as President Yeltsin continued to follow U.S. policies on most Middle East issues, including the enforcement of U.N. sanctions against Libya, their former ally of many years. Particularly in the wake of the April 1994 visit of Prime Minister Rabin to Moscow, many joint ventures were initiated. In May, 1994 Russia signed a tentative agreement to begin supplying oil and natural gas to Israel over a 10-year period, with payment in advance each year.⁸² In June, 1994 an agreement was signed which will allow the United States and Israel to conduct joint business operations in the former Soviet Union, the countries aiming to match U.S. entrepreneurs with Soviet-born Israelis familiar with business operations in their former homeland.⁸³ September, 1994 witnessed a pledge between Russia and Israel on space cooperation; both parties signed a memorandum of understanding for cooperation in civilian and commercial uses of space, especially in the area of commercial satellites. Both countries' space agencies could then, "consider freely and mutually

⁸²Jerusalem Post, May 7, 1994.

⁸³Kuttler, Hillel. Jerusalem Post, June 4, 1994.

the economic potential of space industries and the research of the countries."⁸⁴

3. Public Opinion

Although public opinion among Jews has been generally supportive of the rapprochement with Russia, there are certain exceptions. Some Israelis are suspicious of Russia's continuing loyalty and motives, especially given the uncertain political situation within the Russian government and the strong opposition to Yeltsin. Some Israelis feel that their economy is being overburdened by the massive influx of former Soviet Jews; even the Palestinians have been affected by these immigrants, via the exacerbation of the unemployment problem. "The immigration had both an indirect effect on Palestinians by straining the already fragile economy they depended upon and, later, a direct impact as Soviets filled the menial jobs Arabs had formerly held. In the early 1990's, overqualified Palestinians- the products of the expanding educational system- and overqualified Soviet Jews eyed the same low-level jobs."⁸⁵ Some Hasidic and Lubavitcher Jews in Russia protested during Prime Minister Rabin's visit because of his willingness to return land for peace to the Arabs; the impact of these demonstrations was nominal, but illustrates that support was not universal.⁸⁶

4. Immigration of Former Soviet Jews

Immigration is one of the main issues surrounding Russo-Israeli relations today. From Israel's perspective, there is no question whether Israel should accept so many new immigrants at one time; that is Israel's purpose and the meaning of Zionism, a haven to which the Jews of the world should immigrate. The difficulty lies in the logistics of resettling all of the new citizens in a way which proves productive and satisfying for all.

⁸⁴ Siegel, Judy. Jerusalem Post, September 10, 1994.

⁸⁵ Kimmerling, Baruch and Joel Migdal. Palestinians: The Making of a People. New York: The Free Press, 1993. p. 259.

⁸⁶ Erlanger, Steven. The New York Times. April 26, 1994.

Some people find themselves disappointed, having had unrealistic expectations about their new standard of living and immediate quality of life. Cultural differences and differences in work ethics and career aspirations have caused many new Israeli immigrants to become disillusioned. The Israeli government has been trying to successfully absorb these new citizens as fast as possible, but many have still not been able to find work or permanent housing. In addition, differences in religious practice have caused certain rifts in the Israeli society itself; Jews from the former Soviet Union have, over the decades, become quite secularized in comparison with the native Israelis. Mandatory synagogue attendance is simply too much for some people, Jewish in name only.

Furthermore, as reported by the *New York Times* on October 6, 1994, there have even been incidents, and not infrequently, where new Israeli immigrants have turned out not to be Jewish at all; they merely claimed to be Jewish after being lured to Israel by the stories of the better quality of life and resettlement assistance given to new immigrants under the Israeli "Law of Return," which grants immediate citizenship and resettlement assistance, including direct financial grants, to all Jews who move to Israel.

Public opinion among native Israelis has also undergone a significant change since the influx of Soviet Jews began.

It has not taken long for things to turn sour. At first, the Russians were greeted with excitement. Volunteers bestowed smiles and flowers as the new arrivals disembarked at the airport. Now Israelis are bored by articles describing the latest planeload of violinists and piano tuners. And for thousands of newcomers who are still marooned, unemployed, in drab caravan sites dotted around the country, the 'ascent' to Zion has been a disillusionment. Having punished the Likud in the 1992 elections, the Russian immigrants have recently mounted large protest demonstrations against the Labor government too.⁸⁷

Furthermore, Israel has had to contend with international criticism regarding the settlement of former Soviet Jews within the occupied territories; this has become a political battle within Israel itself- between the conservative Likud and the more liberal Labor parties. Yitzhak Shamir

⁸⁷"A Coat of Many Colours."

created quite a stir in the international arena, not to mention damaging the efforts of political rival and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin for a Middle East peace conference, after proclaiming in a January, 1990 speech that the occupied territories were actually needed to house all of Israel's new immigrants from Russia. This placed Russia in a politically awkward position; the new immigrants were then being used as an excuse by Israel not to honor the rights of the Palestinians who resided there, causing friction between these two groups.

IV. INTERNATIONAL EVENTS ANALYSIS

The aim of this chapter is to analyze the external international events which were occurring and which had a definite impact on the politics of both Russia and Israel, which in turn, affected the rapprochement between Russia and Israel, to include Middle East politics, the changing political situation in Europe, and the influence of the United States.

A. THE QUEST FOR A MIDDLE EAST PEACE PLAN

No international event such as a rapprochement between two countries takes place in a vacuum; although the re-establishment of relations and their subsequent improvement and development may have been initiated for domestic reasons, events happening in the international arena have a great influence on the "why" and the "when" that these changes occur. Russia and Israel are no exception to this.

The roots of today's change in the Middle East dates back to November 1977 and the historic visit of Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat to Jerusalem to speak in the Knesset, which led to the Camp David Accords of 1978 between Egypt and Israel, under the mediation of the United States and President Jimmy Carter. This historic agreement, signed in September, 1979 marks the beginning of an era of cooperation between Israel and the Arabs, the first attempt to trade land for peace. It caused shock and precipitated a very hard line among the leaders of the Likud government in Israel, due to the concessions to which Begin agreed. This conviction also caused widespread unrest and deep cleavages in the Arab world and ultimately cost Sadat his life.

These agreements were followed by the solid foundation laid at the Madrid Peace Conference of October 1991, which overcame the impediments to direct Arab-Israeli talks and launched a real peace process. This conference represented the culmination of the efforts of several countries, including Russia, Israel and the United States.

The Israelis were able to deal successfully with the Egyptians over withdrawal from the Sinai; they were less successful in dealing with the areas inhabited by the Palestinians, namely the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians did not come easily

nor quickly, and it was this bone of contention which remained one of the issues which separated Israel from the Soviet Union for years to come, according to Soviet declarations .

Years of struggle between Israel and the Palestinians, backed by the Soviet Union, were ended by the beginning of real cooperation and advancements in the quest for peace between these two nations at the Madrid Peace Conference, and then later again in September, 1993, when Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasir Arafat signed a Declaration of Principles On Interim Self-Government Arrangements, granting the Palestinians the right to elect a "Council" for self-government in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Agreement provides for the immediate Israeli withdrawal from the Jericho area and the Gaza Strip, and a transitional period of five years for permanent status negotiations. The issues to be negotiated during the transitional period include Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and cooperation with other neighbors, and other issues of common interest.⁸⁸

This Agreement was the fruit of the labors of not only Israel and the PLO, but also the United States and Norway, who acted as mediators. Russia was represented at the signing ceremony by Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, who gave a brief congratulatory speech in which he re-emphasized Russia's position as a "true and determined co-sponsor" to seek peace for Israel and its neighbors, the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, and the stability of the whole region.⁸⁹ Russia's actual role in the peace process, however, was more ceremonial than functional, as it was also previously at the Madrid Conference.

Progress toward peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors was definitely a prerequisite for the eventual rapprochement between Russia (or the former Soviet Union) and Israel; the Soviet Union had sworn to back its Arab allies, and without any sort of concessions on Israel's part, the Soviet Union would have been seen as a traitor had it made any diplomatic moves in Israel's direction. With the dawn of Arab-Israeli

⁸⁸The Israeli-Palestinian Declaration Of Principles, Articles I & V, September 13, 1993.

⁸⁹Kozyrev, Andrei. Speech of September 13, 1993.

cooperation, however, the USSR was able to maintain its integrity while exploring the possibility of improved relations with Israel. As Israel obviously began demonstrating a desire for greater cooperation, the USSR, and later Russia, could honorably face its Arab friends without chagrin.

The Arab states themselves were not always in harmony with one another. As it used to do in its own Union Republics, the Soviet Union often used the tactic of encouraging dissent and fragmentation among certain countries in order to discourage coalition-building which could pose a threat to Soviet authority. One notorious example of this was Stalin's establishment of the Nagorno-Karabagh region of ethnic Armenians, entirely situated within the borders of Azerbaijan; this has kept the two new states at odds with one another, and too unstable to pose a threat to Moscow. Such was also the case in Soviet policy toward the Middle East. "There is substance to the contention that the Soviet Union [needed] Israel so that the Arab world's antagonism to the Jewish state will increase its dependency upon Moscow for arms and political support."⁹⁰ The Soviet Union had signed treaties of Friendship and Cooperation with Syria, one of Israel's enemies, in addition to Iraq, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and North and South Yemen; it had supported Libya, Lebanon, and Egypt (in some capacities), and generally supported the Arab cause against their "oppressors," said to be the Israelis.

B. SYRIA

Syria had had a long and close relationship with the Soviet Union, nurtured by their consistent support of the Arabs' position in their confrontations with the Israelis and often even with other Arab states. The Soviets had supplied the Syrians with high levels of economic and military aid ever since the French stopped supplying them in 1954. Syria, however, did not always act in accordance with Soviet wishes, having joined the United Arab Republic with Egypt in 1958, and refused to attend the 1973 Geneva conference on Middle East peace. Over the years, Syria

⁹⁰Carter, Jimmy. The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985. p. 17.

has not hesitated to exercise its own will in defiance of its alliance with the Soviet Union, and as the Soviet Union's relationship with Israel has improved, their relationship with Syria has deteriorated. This reflects a reevaluation of Soviet interests in the Middle East between Brezhnev and Gorbachev.

These changes were clearly evident during Eduard Shevardnadze's visit to Syria in 1989, where Syrian President Hafez el-Asad reiterated his desire for military parity with Israel and his refusal to work for improved ties with Egypt, Iraq, the PLO and Jordan.⁹¹ Moscow was working for a peaceful solution to Middle East peace based on cooperation, but Syria, under el-Asad's obstinate leadership, would not budge. No doubt he also must have felt betrayed by his long-time ally who was suddenly making overtures toward Syria's enemies.

The change in the Soviets' position toward Syria was expressed quite bluntly by the Soviet ambassador to Syria, Alexander Zotov, in November, 1989 in an article published by the *Washington Post*. This article stated that "new realities" in the USSR would henceforth limit Soviet military assistance to Syria, noting that the Soviets' ability to assist Syria was limited and that Syria's ability to pay for it was in doubt. The article continued that Syria needed to recognize "reasonable defensive sufficiency," and that Moscow would not support Syria in any kind of attack against Israel.⁹²

The declining relations between Syria and the USSR contributed to the ability of the USSR to shift its policy more toward Israel. Indeed, Syria undoubtedly pushed the Soviets in this direction, by means of Assad's demands and obstinacy. And once the shift had begun to take place, Moscow decided to let it continue in this way.

Simultaneously, the United States has been attempting to normalize relations with Syria, knowing that the prospects for a lasting peace are much greater if all parties concerned are willing to cooperate. At present Syria is considered by them to be neither friend nor enemy. Syria's traditional hard-line stance against Israel has made this task a formidable challenge.

⁹¹ Freedman, Robert. Soviet Policy(Gorbachev). p. 69.

⁹² Ibid., p. 89-90.

C. IRAQ

Another Arab country which has added a twist to the picture of Middle East peace is Iraq. In the 1980's, Iraq became one of the most important Soviet partners in the Third World. In 1989, Soviet trade with Iraq amounted to 1.2 billion rubles, surpassing trade with all other developing countries with the exception of India.⁹³ A former ally of the Soviet Union, the PLO, and the United States (during their war with Iran), Iraq was also a respected colleague among the Arab states- until its invasion of Kuwait in August, 1990. Iraq has always been an avowed enemy of Israel, and both sides have frequently exchanged blows, both physical and rhetorical. Iraq's brazen invasion of Kuwait hastily made enemies out of Saudi Arabia and the other states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and lost the support of the Soviet Union, in the process of improving relations with Israel. As was the case with Syria, declining relations with this Arab country further enabled the Russo-Israeli rapprochement to occur.

Iraq spent the next few years attempting to recover from the scars of war, and to maintain solid footing despite the sanctions imposed upon the regime of Saddam Hussein. Russia's policy towards Iraq has been in line with the United States' policy on Iraq. This has directly tied into the domestic political opposition in Russia; those who opposed Yeltsin's leadership therefore opposed his position on Iraq and were willing to excuse Saddam Hussein's actions.

As in the case of Israel, the issue of Russian-Iraqi relations was not only an issue of Russian foreign policy, it was also an issue of Russian domestic politics with hardline critics of Yeltsin, led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky, demanding that not only should Russia stop supporting U.S. policy on Iraq, but that Yeltsin should unilaterally break the embargo against Iraq and restore the Russian-Iraqi alliance to what it had been in Soviet times. A second group of advocates of Iraq argued that for economic reasons Russia should lift the embargo, because in this

⁹³Melkumyan, Yelena. "Soviet Policy and the Gulf Crisis." The Gulf Crisis: Background and Consequences. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1992. p. 81.

way it could receive the \$5-7 billion in debt owed to Russia by Iraq- money badly needed by the hard-pressed Russian economy.⁹⁴

Indeed, the issue of the unpaid Iraqi debt to Russia was what certainly fueled the strong pressure from Yeltsin's opposition to lift the embargo, recommence arms sales, and re-establish the former alliance with Iraq. This course of action, however, would alienate oil-rich kingdoms of the GCC, who were giving Russia financial support, especially Oman, who pledged \$600 million in aid to develop and modernize Russia's oil fields, not to mention endangering U.S.-Russian relations in the Middle East. Yeltsin's government continued, however, to maintain low-level contacts with Iraq in attempt to maintain the maximum influence there without alienating either the United States or the GCC. The strengthening of the Russian-Iraqi relationship continues to be a wedge which is used by Yeltsin's opposition.⁹⁵ Russia's desire to maintain a certain level of relations with Iraq represents a delicate issue in U.S.-Russian relations, and the Russians are therefore being very cautious in maintaining their Iraqi contacts.

D. IRAQ AND THE PLO

Saddam Hussein's expressed support for the Palestinian people (which never materialized) and their subsequent endorsement and support of him was a fatal mistake for the Palestinian people, who lost a great deal of political and financial support from many of their wealthier fellow Arab states of the Gulf. "In the aftermath of the war, the international diplomatic position of the PLO became too weak to sustain the organization's previous policies of insisting that all Arab-Israeli negotiations on the Palestinian issue must include the PLO directly as representative of the Palestinian people, and must be aimed at obtaining a

⁹⁴ Freedman, Robert. Working Paper: "Moscow and the Middle East Since the Collapse of the Soviet Union: A Preliminary Analysis." September, 1994. p. 23.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 24-26.

Palestinian state, not at interim measures."⁹⁶ The PLO had initially adopted a position of neutrality after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, but after it became clear that mediation between Iraq and Kuwait was not possible, in addition to Saddam Hussein's rhetoric about Israel's withdrawal from occupied Palestine, the PLO could not resist the temptation to have the world's attention drawn to their cause.

The result was probably a positive thing for the PLO after all; in being forced to lower their demands, the PLO did finally make it to the bargaining table with Israel, where some progress was made. In this way they may eventually achieve their political goals gradually and peacefully, with the support of the world.

The attack on Kuwait by Iraq functionally destroyed the potential for any mutually beneficial relationship between Iraq and the United States. Saddam Hussein's pledge to destroy Israel, a faithful ally of the U.S., added emphasis to this reality. The United States has actively sought to play a more direct role in the Persian Gulf since the events of 1979 through 1981, the Iranian Revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the doubling of oil prices. Iran and Iraq were seen as the key strategic players in this area. The United States had consistently supported Iraq during the 1980's, when the primary threat in the Gulf was believed to be Iran. Suddenly, the picture changed. Who was now the real threat became unclear.

E. IRAQ, IRAN AND THE U.S.

The United States alternately supported both Iran and Iraq in an attempt to keep any one hostile power from taking control of the region. A new policy has recently been developed, however, which places a greater role on other powers in the area, as well as the United Nations. Officially dubbed "Dual Containment," this policy was articulated in May, 1993 by Martin Indyk, special assistant to the President for Near East and South Asian affairs at the National Security Council. The aim of this policy is to

⁹⁶Simpson, Michael. "The Palestinians and the Gulf Crisis." The Gulf Crisis: Background and Consequences. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1992. p. 247.

isolate both Iran and Iraq regionally, cutting them off from the world economic and trading system, and to encourage a change of regime in Iraq. And while the old U.S. strategy continued to be to prevent any power from supplanting the United States as the dominant force in the gulf, the new strategy places greater responsibility on the U.S.' friends in the region, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, and the GCC.⁹⁷

Critics of dual containment argue that dual containment offers no guidelines for dealing with change in the area, and that it ties American policy to an inherently unstable status quo, in addition to assigning to the United States a unilateral role in managing gulf security at a time when our influence in the gulf is limited.⁹⁸ Proponents counter that our current circumstances in the gulf are different from before, that we do not seek unilaterally to manage gulf security, but to seek along with our regional allies, with whom we enjoy greatly improved relations since the Gulf War, to maintain a favorable balance without depending on Iraq or Iran. In addition, we no longer have as much to fear because a regional balance of power has been established between Iraq and Iran at a much lower level of conventional offensive military capability, nor is there any longer the fear of Soviet efforts to gain a foothold in the Persian Gulf.⁹⁹

Iran still does represent a dangerous uncertainty in the Gulf region, one that has influenced the United States in the development of past and present defense strategies. Iran remained essentially isolated in the immediate post-revolutionary decade; it is not integrated into another regional system (as is Turkey with NATO). Throughout the 1980's, Iran and the United States shared a mutual distrust and animosity toward one another, fueled by events such as the American Embassy hostage crisis, the Iran-Contra Affair, and the downing of an Iranian commercial jet by the U.S.S. Vincennes. Never was there any doubt in Iran who the "great Satan" was- the United States; Iran's revolutionary leadership harbored deep grievances over the United States' close ties and support of the shah.

⁹⁷Gause III, F. Gregory. "The Ilogic of Dual Containment." Foreign Affairs. March/April, 1994. p. 56.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 57.

⁹⁹Lake, Anthony. "Confronting Backlash States." Foreign Affairs. March/April, 1994. p. 48-49.

Even before the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in mid-1989, there was political debate raging within the Iranian government over fundamental political changes and directions in domestic and foreign policies. The new president, Hashemi Rafsanjani, and his government indicated after the Gulf war a desire for a coordinated re-integration into the regional and global political-economic system, having successfully maneuvered his moderate party through the imbroglio. Surprisingly, Iran was a beneficiary of the Gulf crisis. Iraq suddenly turned to Iran for assistance, offering terms which previously would have been unbelievable during their war with one another. Also, the strategic importance of Iran was bolstered, giving Teheran more power to wield in negotiations for economic assistance to their faltering economy. Economic considerations would henceforth overshadow political priorities.¹⁰⁰

Although the strategic importance of both Iraq and Iran has been dramatically reduced since the fall of the Soviet Union, as Iraq and Iran no longer have the ability to play the superpowers off one another, a real threat from Iran still exists. The Clinton Administration has outlined a "five-part challenge" that Iran poses to the United States and the international community: 1) its support for terrorism and assassination across the globe, 2) its opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process, expressed through its support of groups such as *Hezbollah* and *Hamas*, 3) its efforts to subvert friendly Arab governments, 4) its military buildup aimed at dominating the gulf region, and 5) its quest to acquire weapons of mass destruction.¹⁰¹

Israel can be considered a very worthy Middle Eastern opponent to the potential threat from Iran and Iraq. From Russia's perspective, Israel would make a good partner, in addition to the United States, to counter a potential threat emerging from the region. This was one of the many factors which Gorbachev initially had to consider, and Yeltsin must bear in mind, when weighing current and future policy options.

¹⁰⁰ Hart, Jo-Anne. "The Arab Sub-System in Crisis." The Gulf Crisis: Background and Consequences. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1992. p.193.

¹⁰¹ Gause, p. 58.

F. IRAN AND THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

Iran's relations with the former Soviet Union were also changing in the post-Iranian revolutionary period. With the Cold War just beginning to thaw in 1987, the prospect of an increased Soviet role in the gulf led the United States to an increased role providing naval protection to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia toward the end of the Iran-Iraq war, as the potential for the gulf to become the setting for superpower conflict still existed. Indeed, while the Soviet Union supported Iraq in its military buildup, it alienated the conservative Arab gulf states. These relations were greatly improved by the Soviet condemnation of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. As the Cold War gradually came to a close, however, the lessening strategic importance of the gulf affected Soviet foreign policy by allowing Moscow to take a more even-handed approach to Middle East politics. Moscow was simultaneously pursuing improved relations with Kuwait in order to ensure the continued delivery of oil, and re-evaluating its traditional alliances in the region.

At the same time, the nationalities question was coming to the forefront of Soviet politics. This directly affected Moscow's relations with Iran. Of continuing concern between the two countries was the status of the large Azerbaijani population within Iran, an ethnically homogenous group residing on both sides of the Soviet-Iranian border. Moscow was also very much concerned about the influence of the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism coming from inside Iran, as this represented a threat to the stability of the Soviet Central Asian Republics and the legitimacy of the Communist leadership. With the Muslim population inside the Soviet Union at approximately 70 million people, fundamentalist Islam was seen as a volatile movement which could seriously threaten Soviet stability and integrity.

G. EGYPT

Islamic fundamentalism was also becoming a real concern in Egypt in the late 1980's and early 1990's. The United States and Egypt had enjoyed a long and friendly relationship since the early 1970's, proven again during the Gulf War, in which Egypt endorsed the U.S.' position on the Iraqi

invasion of Kuwait and fought side-by-side with the Americans to expel the Iraqi army from Kuwait. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's leadership, however, did not prove charismatic enough to win him widespread support among his own citizens, and radical Islamic groups began to flourish. A growing trend of Islamic conservatism has spread across the country, with more women wearing the veil than ever before. Economically difficult times were exacerbated by rumors of Mubarak's corruption and inability to maintain control. Some of these radical groups advocated violence, terrorism against tourists, an Iranian-style revolution, and challenged his administration within the Egyptian Parliament itself. Certain parties which were deemed too radical were outlawed; thereafter they joined the underground.

Meanwhile, the Egyptian economy was lagging, and Egyptian debt to the United States was mounting. In 1990, a huge chunk of the Egyptian debt to the U.S. was excused in exchange for Egypt's support in the condemnation of Iraq and the Egyptian military support during Desert Storm. Egypt also reinforced its alliances with Saudi Arabia and the GCC in this way.

Since the Soviet Union was no longer committed to opposing the United States during *perestroika* and after the collapse of the Communist government, Russia was then able to also improve its relations with Egypt. In 1987 the Soviet Union's primary goal vis-a-vis Egypt was to keep it isolated among other Arab states because of its peace treaty with Israel. This goal failed, as Arab states decided that each state would decide on its own whether or not to re-establish diplomatic relations with Egypt. Egypt was needed, in the view of the other Arab states, as a counterweight to Iran.¹⁰² Having come a great distance since their days of enmity in the 1970's and early 80's, Egypt and the USSR experienced a rapprochement in 1988 which culminated in a diplomatic visit between Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismat Abd-el Meguid and Shevardnadze and Gorbachev in Moscow.

Moscow seems to have decided to reject the old policy of trying to isolate Egypt if only because by the beginning of 1988, Egypt had successfully reintegrated itself into the Arab world

¹⁰²Freedman, Robert. Soviet Policy(Gorbachev), p. 41.

despite Camp David. Given that Egypt had become an active supporter of an international conference to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict, Moscow evidently decided to capitalize on Egypt's increased influence in the Arab world to help arrange the conference or, at a minimum, to politically isolate and bring diplomatic pressure on Israel and the United States, who continued to oppose the conference.¹⁰³

H. ISRAEL AND THE PLO

Although Moscow had declared its criteria for the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel to be Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories and the restoration of the Palestinians' legitimate rights, the signing of the Declaration of Principles represented a solid step in that direction, one which opened the door to the Soviet Union. They were then able to maintain their national integrity in front of the Arab world and justify the actions that were in their new best interests by the fact that Israel was complying with their requirements, albeit not entirely. Arab countries did not have to feel that their ally had gone back on its word, since steps were being taken to provide the Palestinians their autonomy.

Although continuing negotiations between Israel and the PLO stalled in 1994 due to an increase in international terrorism by certain radical fundamentalist Islamic groups, such as the *Hamas*' organization which are opposed to any kind of compromise, a new series of negotiations took place under the mediation of President Clinton in February 1995 between the parties who participated in the September 1993 agreements.

I. THE ROLE OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND POLITICS

The United States Government has had a particularly influential role in the shaping of international politics for many years; U.S. foreign policy has been formulated and implemented due to a myriad of factors which represent the interests of the American people. The United States Congress has been the forum in which much of this influence takes place.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 55-56.

As early as the mid nineteenth century, members of Congress have been subjected to lobbies representing the interests of their constituents regarding the United States' relations with Russia, Jewish interests, and the nascent Zionist movement, which would culminate in the State of Israel. "In 1840, several years after the Ashkenazim had begun arriving from Germany, American Jews became involved in the politics of foreign policy. With the support of Christian missionaries, this ethnoreligious group of some 15,000 members persuaded but did not pressure President Martin Van Buren to protest the persecution of Jews in Damascus who had been charged with ritual murder."¹⁰⁴

Thus began the movement of politicking to assist other Diaspora Jews in distress. The original group of Jewish activists grew in the subsequent decades, and obtained an influential voice on behalf of persecuted ethnoreligious brethren in Morocco, Serbia, Romania, and Russia. This Jewish ethnic lobby became more effective in the wake of the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881, which produced anti-Semitic laws and a wave of riots against Jews in Russia. These hardships were the impetus for many of these persecuted individuals to emigrate to the United States, where they often joined the ranks of their fellow Jewish activists. Both new and former immigrants bonded together for their common cause, and were successful in persuading the White House to remonstrate against the Russian pogroms and the mistreatment of Jews in the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary.¹⁰⁵

These efforts resulted in the introduction in the House of Representatives in 1892 by Representative Irvine Dungan of Ohio, a resolution which called for the severing of diplomatic relations with Russia. Although the resolution did not pass, both the Republican and the Democratic Party platforms contained planks which expressed concern for abused Jews,

Among the purportedly new ethnic groups, the Jews thus quickly stood out in their ability to bring organized political influence to bear on foreign policy. Their effectiveness rose from

¹⁰⁴ Deconde, Alexander. Ethnicity, Race, and American Foreign Policy. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992. p. 52.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

a widespread sympathy they elicited among other Americans because of the brutalities they had suffered, and from organized political activity by earlier immigrants. Other factors in the Jews' successful lobbying were an intelligentsia with access to policymakers and to the public and the support of wealthy Jewish leaders who had already established themselves in American society.¹⁰⁶

As the impact of the Jewish lobby's success became felt, the organization gained momentum and established a broader agenda. In the early 1900's, letters deluged the White House in protest to the continued brutality toward Jews in Russia. Ethno-religious leaders staged protests and led a march of over 50,000 people through the streets of New York City in 1905. In 1906, prominent Jewish lobbyist and banker Jacob Schiff organized a number of Jewish and other banking firms to block the extension of credit to Russia. Subsequently, the American Jewish Committee was formed, a lobby which attempted to sway policy regarding a commercial treaty of 1832, which empowered Russia to bar American Jews from entering the country. The American Jewish Committee showered Congress with demands for the abrogation of the treaty, which was terminated by President William H. Taft in December, 1912.¹⁰⁷

So it happened that in the wake of World War One, the United States was responsive to and supportive of the plan for the establishment of a Jewish national home, as articulated by British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour's Declaration, which "viewed with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavors to fulfill the achievement of this objective."¹⁰⁸

The World War Two years would render infamous the atrocities committed by the German Third Reich against the Jews as an ethnic group. And, unlike the previous holocausts, of Ukrainians by Stalin during his collectivization campaign, or of Armenians at the hands of the Turks, the Jewish holocaust received unprecedeted publicity. American

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁰⁸The Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917.

leaders could not help but be moved by the tales of horror and injustice incurred by the Jews of Europe. .

Although a Jewish Palestine was still viewed by the U.S. State Department at the end of 1946 largely as a British preserve, an approach which precluded the establishment of a Jewish state,¹⁰⁹ the next year was spent in preparation for the presidential election, and President Truman was naturally influenced by the massive American Jewish political lobby which strongly advocated the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. American Jewish activists joined forces with their British contemporaries and Zionists of the world to lobby for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people, which came into existence on May 14, 1948.

Meanwhile, with massive Jewish immigration, the United States was becoming the center of world Zionism. The U. S., who was at that time experiencing very poor relations with the Soviet Union, did announce *de facto* recognition of Israel immediately after Israel's proclamation of independence, with widespread popular support in the U.S. So began the long history of close relations and support for Israel by Washington. The American Jewish lobbyists have ensured the United States' continued support of Israel on many levels, including the passage of legislation favorable to Jewish concerns, most notably the Jackson-Vanik Amendment of 1972-75. In this way the United States continues to have a profound impact on Russo-Israeli relations. The relationship has remained essentially positive throughout the duration of the Cold War, to the present day.

1. Today's U.S. Foreign Policy

While the face of international politics has changed drastically in recent years, the making of American foreign policy has been undergoing a more gradual but equally definite change over the past few decades. This has been as much in reaction to the changing world as it has been to internal domestic political change.

¹⁰⁹Ganin, Zvi. Truman, American Jewry, and Israel, 1945-1948. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979. p. 115.

Two important factors affect U.S. foreign policy today. First, from the 1960's to the present, from Lyndon Johnson to Bill Clinton, several weak presidencies have precipitated a shift in power from the presidency to the Congress, which now bears an ever-greater responsibility for the formulation and administration of U.S. foreign policy. The administrations of Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and initially that of Richard Nixon are notable exceptions to this trend. Fortunately, the turnover of the U.S. Senate is relatively low, creating a stable body which is able to gain some level of expertise in these intricate issues, and carry out a coherent and consistent plan. Secondly, there is great uncertainty of who the new adversary is or will be. The United States must therefore be extremely cautious in constructing a foreign policy which will not be too rigid, but at the same time effective enough to achieve its goals.¹¹⁰

The United States' program of aid to Russia is a good example of why this policy needs to be flexible, due to the uncertainty of Russia's future and the great instability there. Recent failures of peacekeeping missions, whether via the United Nations, NATO, unilaterally or bilaterally have raised serious questions about organizational coalition management.

The situation in the Middle East is still unresolved; the threat in the Persian Gulf area is still uncertain.

America's interest in the gulf remains appropriately unchanged with the end of the Cold War: guaranteeing the uninterrupted flow of oil to the world market at prices that do not damage the economies of the United States and its allies in the advanced industrialized world. What has changed is the perception of where the threats to that interest lie, and how the United States should respond.¹¹¹

With the end of the Cold War, some people suggest that Israel is no longer of such vital strategic value to the United States, due to the diminished threat from Russia and the cessation of the tendency to exert a dominating sphere of influence in the area. Yet Russia's own domestic political situation is currently extremely fragile and volatile, and one

¹¹⁰D'Amato, Richard. (Chief Counsel to Senate Appropriations Committee) Lecture. Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, February 10, 1995.

¹¹¹Gause III, p. 58.

should therefore not make casual predictions about the potential for change. "All the vices of Communism, which used to be more or less camouflaged by the party's system of euphemisms and restrained by hierarchical discipline, are now unleashed in the atmosphere of total impunity."¹¹² As the situation becomes more and more desperate, the government of Boris Yeltsin will become more unstable. And if a radical leader comes to power, not only will relations with Israel be in question, but Russia's entire political status quo may be in jeopardy.

While it may be true that Russia no longer presents a threat to U.S. interests in the Middle East, the continuing unresolved conflicts between Israel and certain Arab countries, not to mention the ongoing conflicts among the Arab countries themselves, present a potentially dangerous uncertainty, one for which we ought to be prepared.

¹¹²Vassily Aksyonov, The New York Times, November 22, 1994. p. A15.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Many different factors, both the domestic political changes occurring within Israel and Russia, plus the constantly changing dynamics of international politics were responsible for the rapprochement between Russia and Israel which began in the late 1980's and culminated in the mid 1990's. A proposal that the rapprochement was initiated because of a unilateral Soviet policy change in the wake of *perestroika* would be partially correct, but far too simplistic.

Timing is everything. Middle East politics, U.S. politics, the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the struggling Russian economy, these factors all played important roles in why the rapprochement occurred when it did. Had one of these elements been less favorable, the improvement in relations may have taken place many years from now- or not at all.

The turmoil present in the Russian domestic political situation since the collapse of the Soviet Union required a re-evaluation of Soviet strategy, one that had already begun to change under Gorbachev's *perestroika*. This re-evaluation of interests, particularly interests in the Middle East, identified Israel as a country whose friendship with Russia could prove very beneficial to Russia.

The terms Russia presented for the re-establishment of relations, Israel's actions to restore some semblance of autonomy and to work toward a peaceful solution with the Palestinians, were met by Israel's talks with the PLO and willingness to cooperate in this regard. The timing was just right in this respect as well, as the conservative Likud government in Israel had just been replaced by the more liberal Labor party, led by Yitzhak Rabin. The agreement signed in September, 1993, the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles, demonstrated Israel's earnest desire to come to a peaceful settlement with the Palestinians. Co-sponsored by Russia, this agreement cast a favorable light upon Russia in its continuing role as an international power and influential mediator.

Change was possible in Russia due to changes in the bureaucracy, public opinion, and ideology, as reflected by the political rhetoric regarding Israel and Jews.

Although some politicians still in office remain communists but in name, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yeltsin's stormy presidency has created the opportunity for many rigid, old-school, anti-Israel communists to be replaced with more open-minded individuals who can readily accept new ideas.

The trends in public opinion in Russia do not necessarily support the explanation why the rapprochement between Israel and the former Soviet Union occurred, but they are certainly reflective of it. Official anti-Semitism has been much lower in past years until just recently. Perhaps on the personal level the public has been affected by recent anti-Semitic campaigns, but it has not the legitimate foundation to cause any kind of change in national policy. If this trend continues, however, and individuals like Vladimir Zhirinovsky continue to gain support, some change may become imminent.

Russia's and Israel's relations with the United States, Egypt, Syria, Iran, Iraq, the PLO and other Middle Eastern countries all had significant effects on the rapprochement. Public opinion in Russia regarding Arab Middle Eastern states became more balanced and objective; this was reflected in the status of Russia's new alliances. The United States encouraged a Russo-Israeli rapprochement, , and the issue of the emigration of former Soviet Jews became centerpiece to this question.

The road to re-establishment of relations has been long and difficult. The issue of emigration from Russia to Israel has been both a cause and a reflection of the ups and downs in this relationship. With former Soviet Jews now making up approximately 10% of Israel's population, improved relations are more critical than ever, as issues of concern to both of these countries will certainly continue to arise.

It is hoped that greater cooperation in the field of business will generate a positive economic impact back in Russia, whose economy is suffering badly, and can use all the infusions of cash, technology, and investments than it can get. Joint ventures in everything from agriculture to outer space are underway between Israel and Russia, which will also hopefully stimulate employment in the overburdened Israeli sector.

Russia currently enjoys a healthy relationship with Israel. Russia's image has been enhanced in the West as a fair and open-minded state, a country willing to set the example as a peacemaker in the world arena.

Russia's strategic position has been also enhanced in the Middle East with a strong and stable ally such as Israel.

Could the rapprochement have occurred without the collapse of the Soviet Union? Yes, but it is not very likely. Although Gorbachev's perestroika opened the door to Israel and initiated the first of the positive political rhetoric, it is very probable that the continued existence of the Soviet Union would have prolonged the competition for spheres of influence between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Middle East. Since Israel has historically been such a staunch ally of the United States, it would not have been easy for the Soviets to approach the Israelis while there was still any measure of mistrust or animosity between them and the U.S.

History demonstrates how changes in the relations between superpowers can have broad impacts on other countries. With the end of the Cold War, Russia suddenly had numerous new options to pursue. One of these was Yeltsin's decision to continue Gorbachev's plan of a rapprochement with Israel. It has so far proven to be a mutually beneficial venture.

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10. **LT Kelley G. Dunkelberg**
668 Lions Gate Lane
Odenton, MD 21113

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